KORN THE CHAOS OF FOLLOW THE LEADER

METAL HAMMER

15-PAGE ALL-STAR SPECIAL

PANTERA

REASSESSED BY ROB HALFORD, SCOTT IAN, KING DIAMOND, DAVE MUSTAINE & MORE

JOEY JORDISON

HITS BACK AT HIS DOUBTERS

NO EGO. NO BULLS**T.
NO MORE 'MAD DAVEY'

DISTURBED

THE UNLIKELY REBIRTH OF DAVID DRAIMAN

+

WHILE SHE SLEEPS

...ARE CHANNELLING *DAFT PUNK*?!

HALESTORM

HOW TO MAKE A 21st CENTURY ROCK STAR

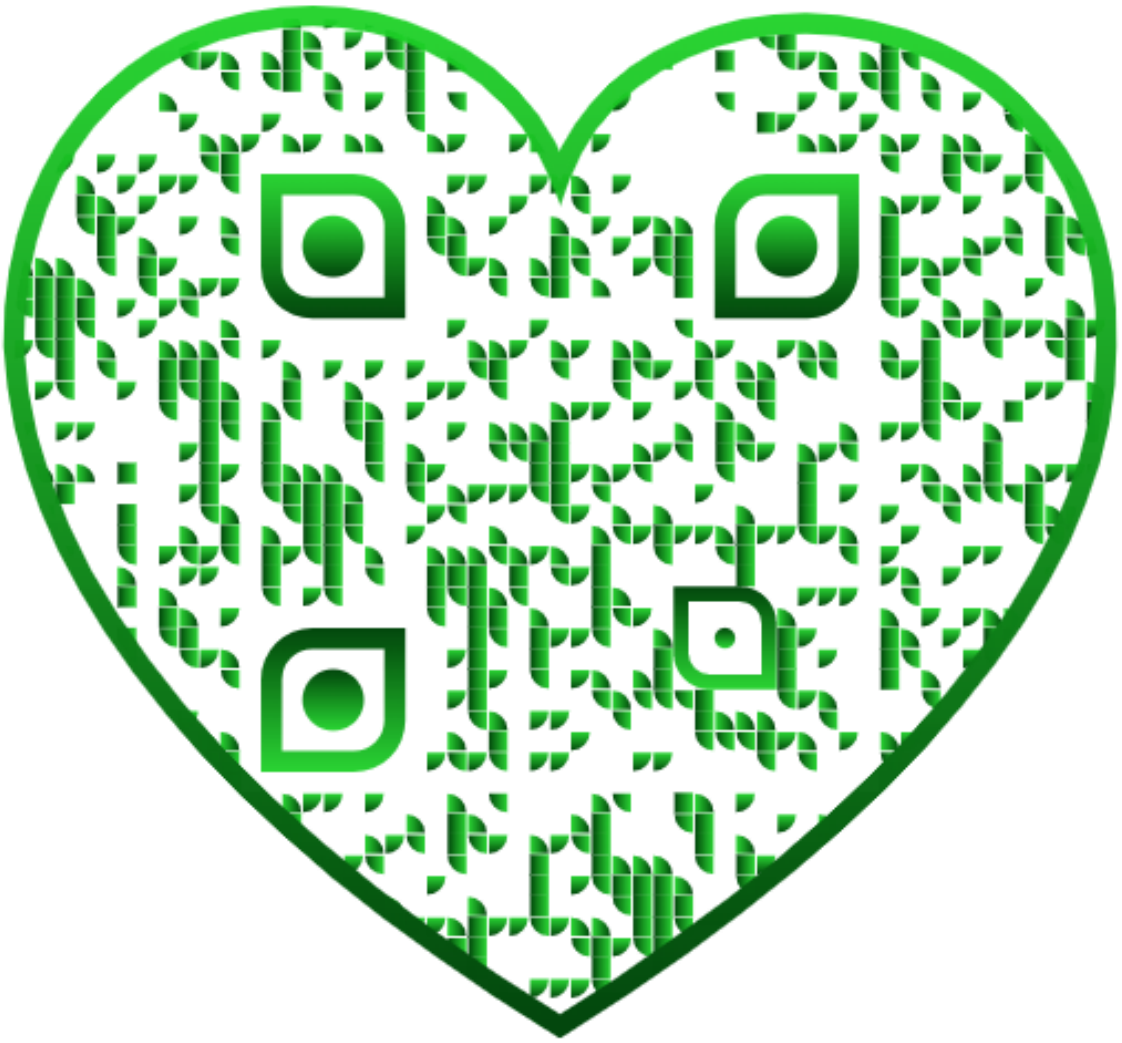
SVALBARD

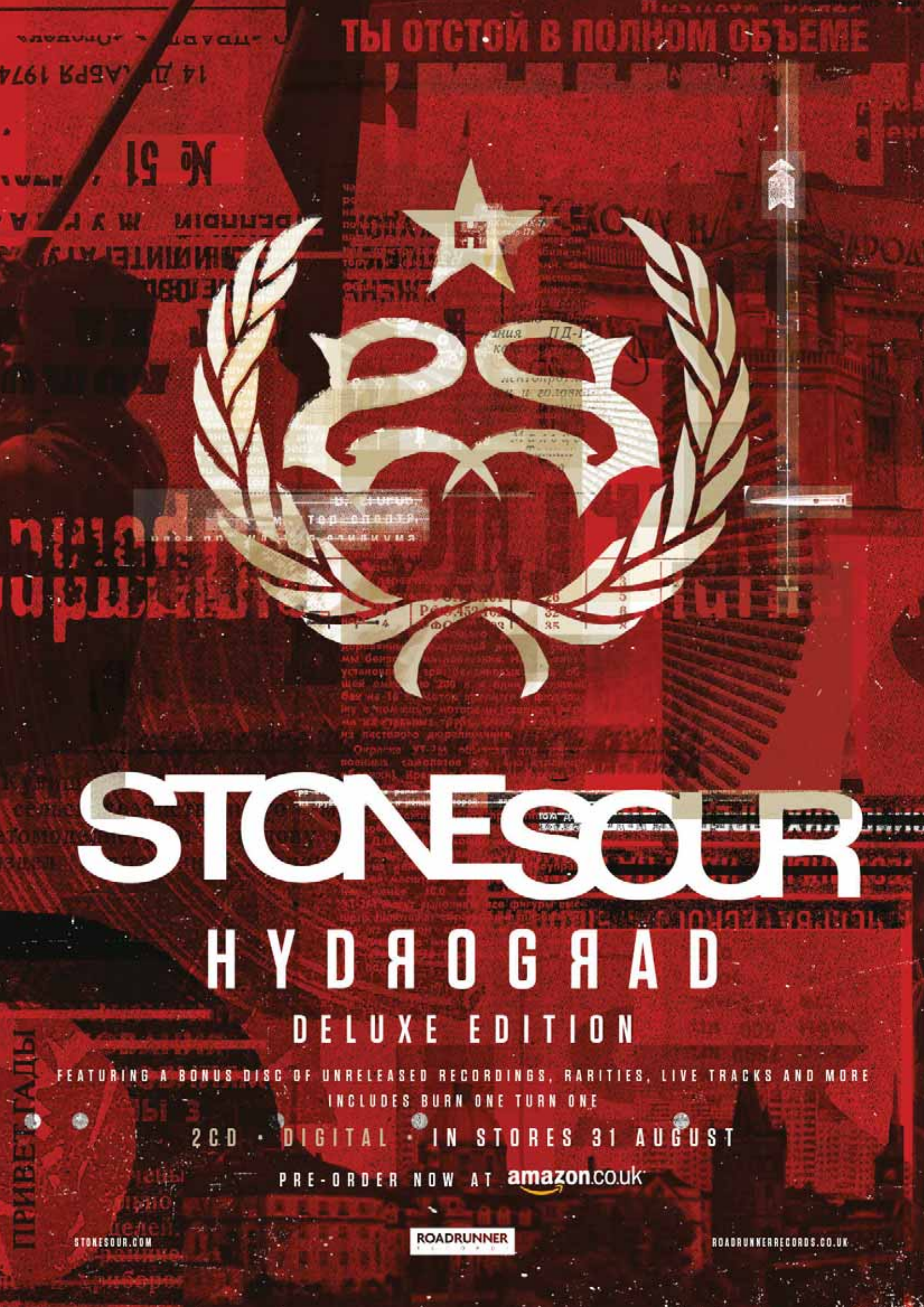
THE UNDERGROUND SENSATION EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

ALSO

EPICA • THE FEVER 333
ARCH ENEMY • ÅRABROT
DORO • ANTHRAX & MORE

FUTURE
ISSUE 313

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IN YOUR ISSUE

8 THE FEVER 333
Former Letlive frontman Jason Aalon Butler tells us why he wants to burn everything down and start again.

10 WHILE SHE SLEEPS
One of the UK's brightest young bands are gearing up for album number four. We jump in the studio to see how it's all coming along.

12 ANTHRAX
Scott Ian reveals how he managed to get official Judge Dredd approval to help propel the song that would make them household names.

14 EPICA
What links symphonic metal majesty and a red dude with a giant hand? We nerd out with Rob.

66 SINSAENUM
Joey Jordison and Frédéric Leclercq reveal the next steps for the extreme metal supergroup.

70 DORO
Metal's Queen is back with a brand new album – and true to form, she isn't doing anything by halves.

80 CENTURY MEDIA
Arch Enemy, Lacuna Coil and more reveal how one label helped to define metal across 30 blazing years.

84 SKELETONWITCH
They've had to suffer some career-threatening issues, but the blackened thrashers have come out swinging.

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

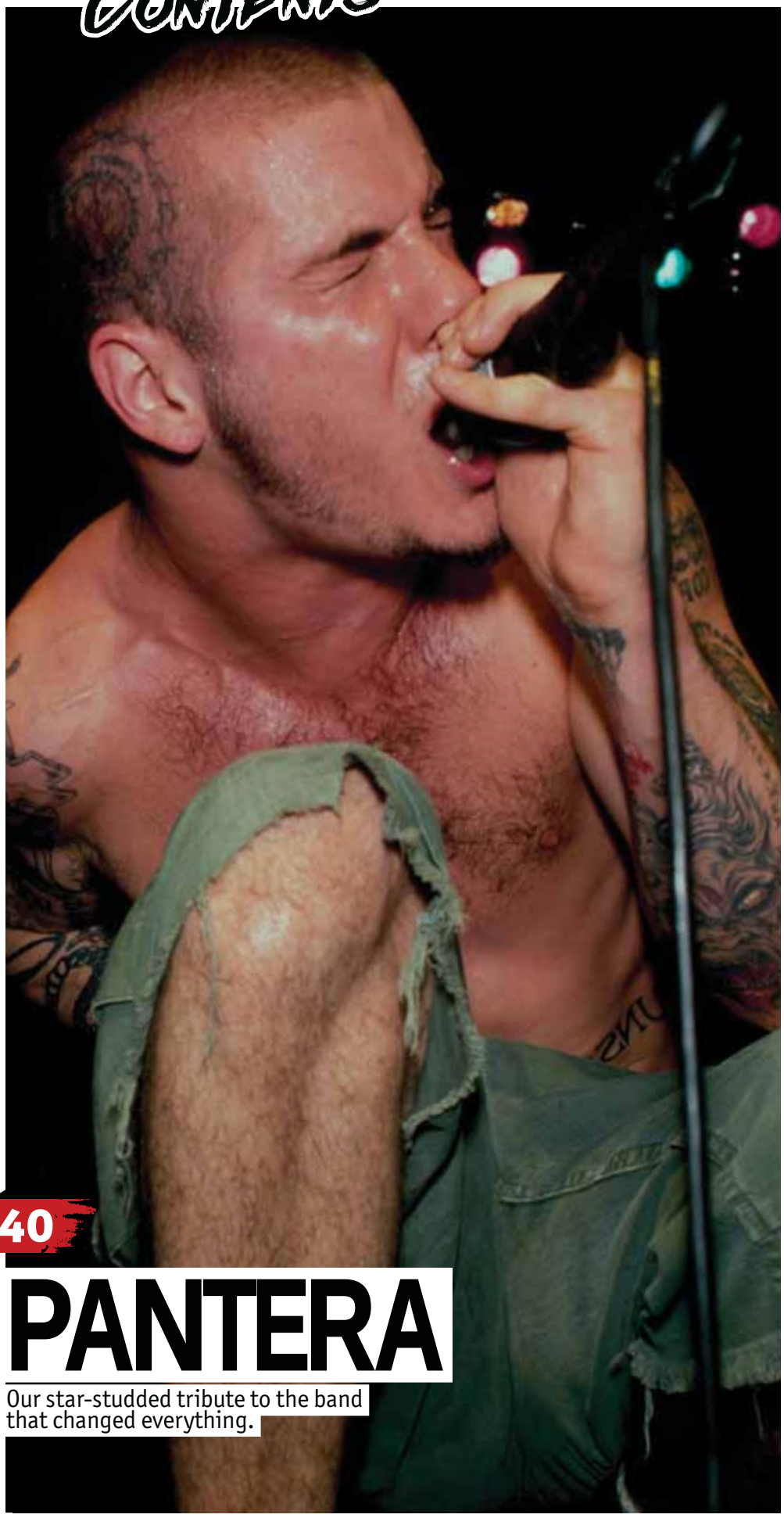
YOUR MONTHLY FREE EXTREME MAGAZINE

114 ÅRABROT
Norway's noise rock deviants stared death in the face, and triumphed.

118 MANTAR
Some bands just want to see the world burn, and make an almighty racket in the process.

120 FRESH MEAT
New noise from Khôrada, Carnation and Tomb Mold.

122 ALBUMS
Årabrot, Krisiun, The Skull, Mantar, Jungle Rot, Uniform, Haunt, Innumerable Forms, The Spirit, a NWOBHM compilation and more.



40

PANTERA

Our star-studded tribute to the band that changed everything.

FOUR HUNDRED MILLION

That was, at the time of going to press, the number of views racked up by Disturbed's now-legendary take on Simon & Garfunkel's *The Sound Of Silence*. The unlikely cover's globe-conquering success is symptomatic of the Chicago natives' habit of shrugging off all expectation and defying their strongest critics in the process.

The fact is that Disturbed – and their irrepressible leader, David Draiman – are one of metal's great success stories, evolving from a nu metal oddity into one of our biggest bands. In our world-exclusive interview, we dig inside their inexplicable, unstoppable rise to power, plus take a peek inside new album *Evolution* and what it means for their future.

With the metal world still reeling from the loss of Vinnie Paul, we thought it was the right time to pay a special tribute to Pantera – which is why we've dedicated 15 pages of this issue to their legacy. We also brought in some very special friends to help us tell their story, from the unbelievable highs of the music to the turmoil behind the scenes that saw it end in tears. We may never see another band like them.

Throw in interviews with everyone from living legends like Anthrax and Doro to modern-day heavyweights such as Halestorm and Korn, right down to rising heroes like Svalbard and Skynd, and you have an issue stacked with metal from every part of the spectrum. It's an exciting time to be a metalhead.

KEEP IT HEAVY

EDITOR

30

DISTURBED

How did the band that brought us *Down With The Sickness* become one of the biggest successes in modern metal? David Draiman reveals all...

56

HALESTORM

What would Lzzy say to her 14-year-old self now if she had the chance? (Probably not half as much as she'd say to her sexist guitar teacher...)

60

KORN

The boys from Bakersfield revisit the chaos and the catharsis of *Follow The Leader*, an incredible 20 years after its release.

66

70

80

102

76

SVALBARD

They're the underground's most exciting young band – but don't expect all the hype to dull their message.

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
HEAD TO PAGE 28 FOR MORE DETAILS

REVIEWS

26 **COOL SHIT**
Coheed And Cambria reveal their gargantuan box set, plus metal-cased Immortal albums, AC/DC and *Jurassic Park* jackets, Skyharbor hoodies and more!

86 **ALBUMS**
Alice In Chains, Clutch, The Amity Affliction, Korpiklaani, Vôdûn and more get dissected by the crack team of *Hammer* scribes.

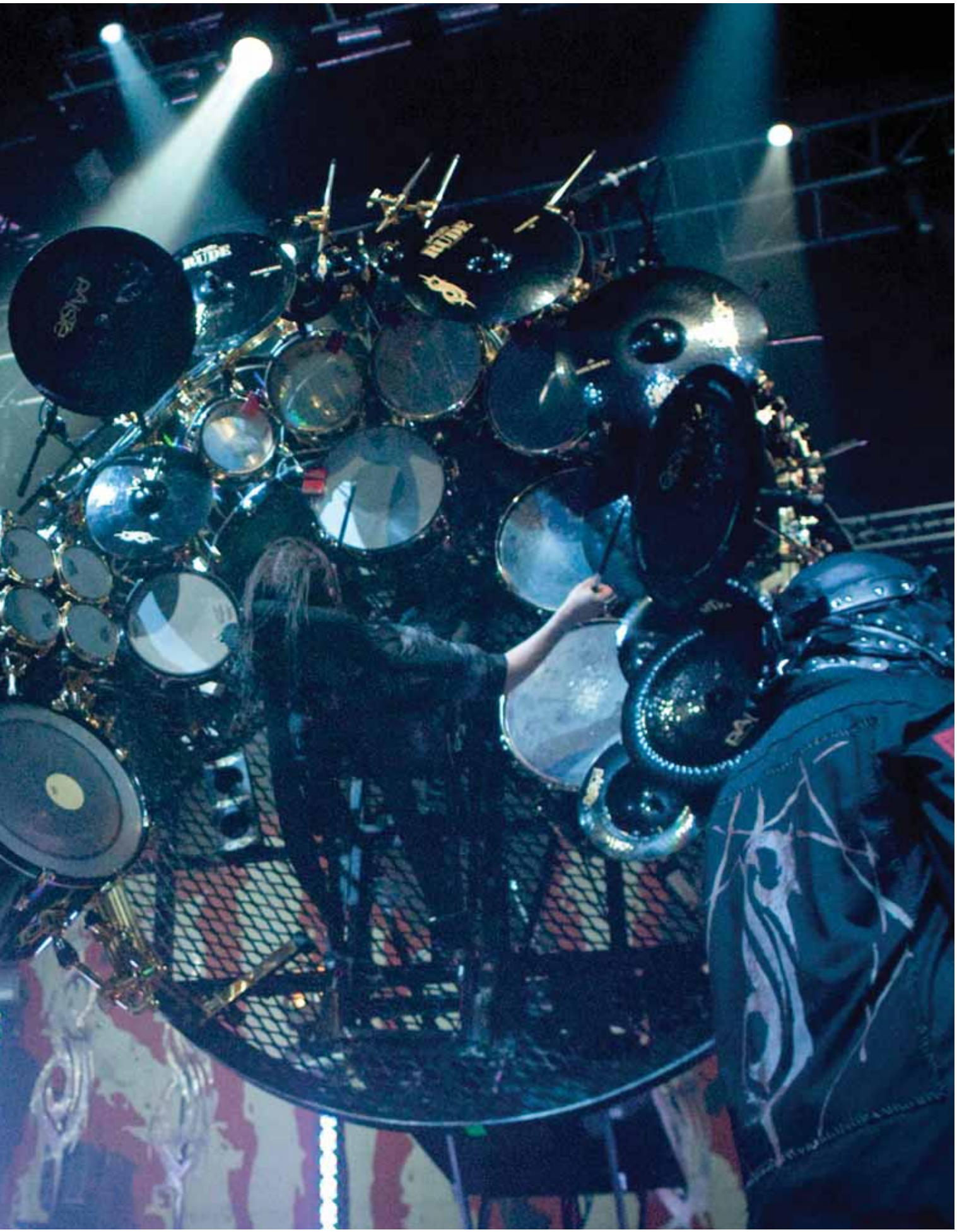
102 **LIVES**
Sikth and Betraying The Martyrs go wild at UK Tech-Fest, Ozzy and Ihsahn take on a Nordic fortress, plus Mastodon, Primus, Ministry, Touché Amoré, Tremonti and more!

SLIPKNOT

CARDIFF INTERNATIONAL ARENA, WALES

DECEMBER 5, 2008

TEN YEARS AGO this month, Slipknot unleashed the album that would consolidate them as the biggest band to hit metal since Metallica. *All Hope Is Gone* would see the Des Moines heavyweights land their first Number One on the Billboard 200, confirming to the mainstream what the metal world already knew: that this phenomenon wasn't going anywhere. This shot, taken from the band's blistering headline set at Cardiff International Arena, was just a glimpse of the stage-conquering behemoth that the nine misfits from Iowa had grown into. *All Hope Is Gone* would also prove to be the last album to feature Joey Jordison and, most fatefully, Paul Gray, who would pass away two years later. ✠



GETTY

FIVE MINUTES ALONE WITH...

JASON AALON BUTLER

THE FEVER 333

The former Letlive man has spent 2018 smashing stages with new project The Fever 333

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

AFTER JASON AALON Butler dissolved Letlive – one of the most critically revered bands of the last decade – we didn't know how long it'd be before we experienced his unique brand of chaos again. He's since spent his time performing guerilla gigs outside of donut shops, working with big-name producers like Travis Barker and John Feldman and making a stunning UK return at Download with his latest project, The Fever 333. Ahead of their set at Reading and Leeds this month, we caught up with the man himself to talk rap, revolution, punk and protests.

WHAT WAS THE INTENTION WITH THE FEVER 333 WHEN YOU CONCEIVED IT?

"With this project every piece of the puzzle, from the artwork to the live show to the music itself, all played into the ideology. I wanted to make sure every movement was deliberate and the message we're trying to offer a representation of is clear."

SONICALLY IT'S LEANING ON A LOT MORE THAN PUNK ROCK, TOO...

"Yeah, well one of the big things was for me to show my love of rap and electronic music. To me, the way those genres have been able to evolve and to shift their culture is indicative that people want more from their art now, whether that's personally, sonically, politically or ideologically, and for some odd reason rock'n'roll has chosen to concede to the environment around it. Rock'n'roll came from blues and chain gang music and real struggle, it has a tremendous amount in common with hip hop. We want to make sure we can shift hip hop and punk rock into a new direction, to affect culture, that's what I'm interested in. That's what music does; it creates culture for people to exist in, to assimilate in, to be represented in. We have to affect that culture and not just ride the wave."

ARE YOU DISAPPOINTED BY THE CURRENT STATE OF HEAVY MUSIC, THEN?

"I don't feel let down, but I do want to know when we decided to abandon a subversive presence in this style of music. Rock'n'roll and punk rock was challenging in its sonics and its ideas, that was what was so beautiful about it. Now we're becoming complacent and playing catch-up. All we have to do is look at the history of punk, metal and hip hop to see that what we have to do is burn it all down and start again. We come off of the backs of bands that did that – Public Enemy, Rage Against The Machine, even fucking Pearl Jam!"

SO HOW DIFFICULT WILL IT BE FOR YOU TO THRIVE IN 2018 WITH THAT ATTITUDE?

"This is the thing: when we do reach the door of the – let's be ambitious and call it 'revolution', or let's be modest and call it 'change' – we peek inside and we see that not only is it frowned upon by people, but that shit don't pay! Revolution don't pay! But when you invest in change you have to accept the very high chance that you won't see the rewards of your efforts. Most revolutionary moments take decades, the figure-heads are usually gone or assassinated. We are fighting such a massive machine, a powerful, incendiary, manipulative presence that's enveloped the world for millennia. And people will have to sacrifice today for the results of tomorrow, and that isn't as appealing as getting to ride the limo to an awards show."

SO, THE FEVER 333 IS MORE THAN JUST A BAND TO YOU?

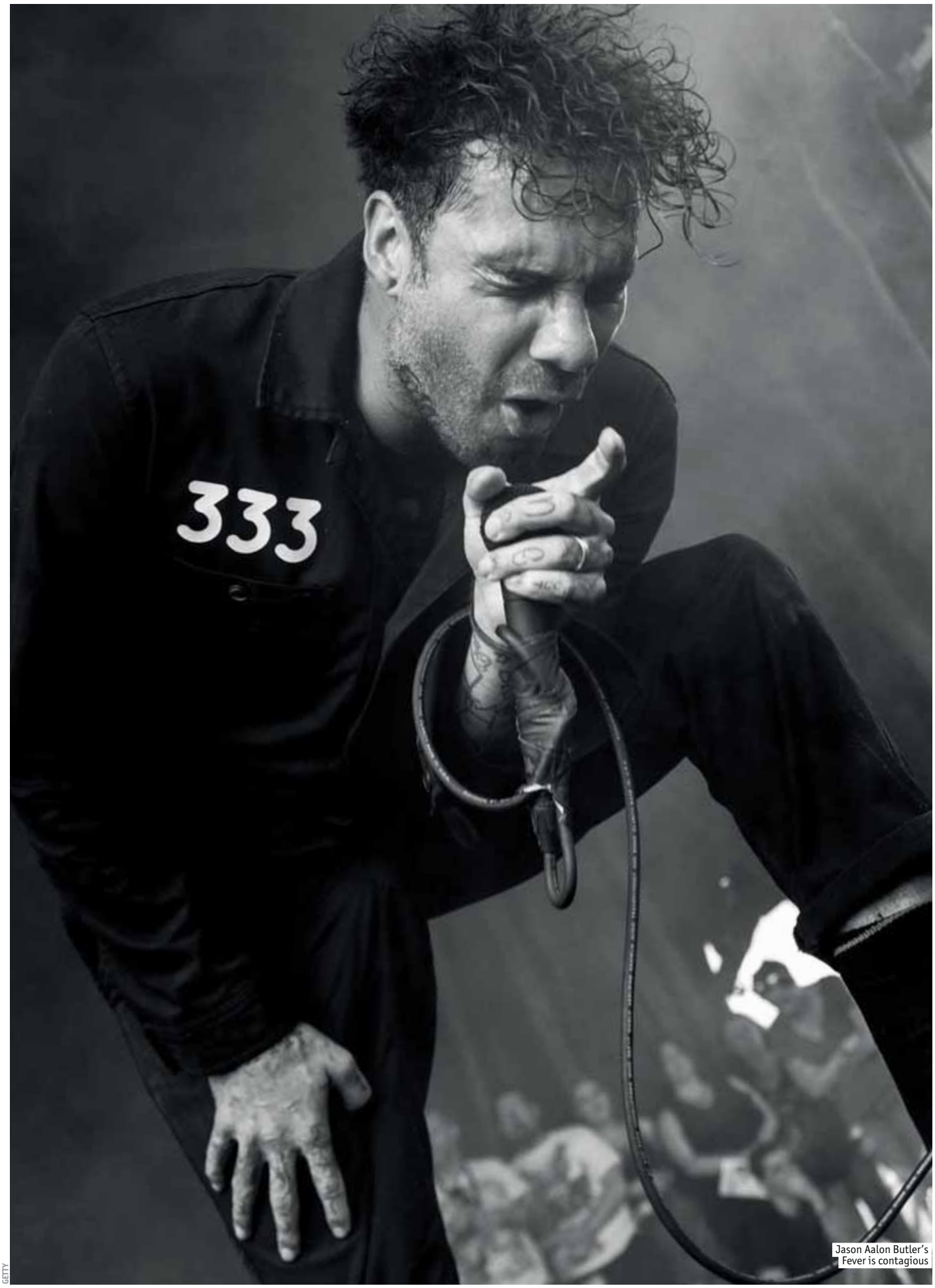
"Absolutely. You can't just write the music anymore, you have to be with the people, in the crowd while the protest is happening, as face-to-face as you can. You have to be willing to go there with the people and be part of the movement that you are trying to soundtrack. People aren't always willing to do that."

PEOPLE THINK THAT SHARING THINGS ONLINE EQUATES TO 'FIGHTING THE SYSTEM' THESE DAYS DON'T THEY?

"Exactly! You don't want to be part of something, that's fine, but don't fucking tell me you're part of the revolution. People may think they are creating an idea, but if you talk about an idea and you don't do anything about it, you falsify it, you make it weak. We left-leaning liberals all looked on Facebook and said, 'Oh, no one likes Trump!' And now we have a racist, Islamophobic, unstable man as one of the most powerful people in the world. We just talked about it, but we have to *be* about it! I want to use this opportunity to say that the media have a responsibility. I know you gotta post about Foo Fighters or whoever, but if you posted one article in 10 about bands looking to change things then that would at least give those ideas real representation." ✠

"ROCK HAS SO MUCH IN COMMON WITH HIP HOP"

THE FEVER 333 PLAY READING AND LEEDS LATER THIS MONTH. *MADE AN AMERICA* IS OUT NOW VIA ROADRUNNER



GETTY

Jason Aalon Butler's Fever is contagious

WHILE SHE SLEEPS

Why have Britain's Great White Hopes starting jamming Daft Punk?!

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICS: ENZO IRIARTE

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
4

PRODUCER:
Carl Brown and While She Sleeps

STUDIO:
Six Audio

EXPECT:
More expansion of the melodic hooks heard on the previous record, but with dirtier, punkier riffs and something a little special

IT FEELS LIKE a lifetime that we've been talking about While She Sleeps as the future of British metal. And yet, it seems that despite their bulletproof recorded output, the Sheffield quintet have never quite hit the heady heights they were capable of. Then last year's excellent *You Are We* album catapulted them firmly back to the higher echelons of our scene, kickstarting a cycle that was topped with a ferocious show supporting the mighty Architects at Alexandra Palace back in February. Now, they need to build on their returning momentum. We caught up with guitarist Sean Long about new music, continuing down the DIY path and being influenced by punk rock, the 90s and, erm, Daft Punk.

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE IN THE STUDIO AGAIN? MANY OF YOUR CONTEMPORARIES NEVER GOT AS FAR AS MAKING THEIR FOURTH ALBUM.
"Yeah, it's pretty weird when you put it like that. When we first started this band, there were other bands that we looked up to and they've gone now, bands that you just thought were going to go on and do amazing things. So, believe me, we really don't take it for granted that we're still here. Just the fact that we are talking about making a fourth full-length album and people care is enough for me. In fact, we've taken that attitude into the studio with us; we're getting older and we don't want to leave anything in, we want to get it all out of us."

Nope, doesn't sound like Daft Punk to us. Phew!

YOUR LAST ALBUM, *YOU ARE WE*, WAS MADE, ESSENTIALLY, AS A COMPLETELY DIY PROJECT, TO THE POINT WHERE YOU EVEN BUILT YOUR OWN STUDIO. WHAT HAS THAT EXPERIENCE TAUGHT YOU GOING INTO THIS RECORD?
"I think it was just to trust ourselves. We had a lot of problems before the last album, which I don't really want to go into here, but we just felt that we needed to trust our vision and to take that risk to see if we could do exactly what we wanted on our own terms and make our fans come with us. It's given us a lot of confidence to take into this record, because the *You Are We* cycle went so perfectly – it literally was as perfect as we could have dreamt."

EACH WHILE SHE SLEEPS ALBUM SEEMS TO HAVE ITS OWN FLAVOUR, SO WHAT CAN WE EXPECT THIS TIME?
"It's hard for me to say. I don't really like talking about what we sound like, but I feel excited that people don't really know what they are going to get from us. I think people know the name While She Sleeps, but they don't have a real idea of what sort of band we are. That makes me really proud, and we are aiming to surprise people again."

"THESE SONGS HAVE GOT US NERVOUS"

While She Sleeps want to be "one of the definitive bands of this generation"

THAT'S CERTAINLY INTRIGUING...
"Yeah, there are a few things in there that you would never see coming. We've been quite inspired by a lot of stuff from our youth, that creeping sense of nostalgia that you seem to acquire as you get older, so there is a 90s feel – Green Day and Blink 182 and all those punk bands. Also, my Mum used to listen to a lot of Clubland stuff, and there's a bit of that in there too..."

SORRY, WHAT?
"Seriously! I mean I think you'd struggle to hear it unless you were really looking for it, but I'm really bored by typical metal guitars at this point, so I always try to look for new types of music to pull from and use for how I write riffs. Daft Punk have been a really big influence as well, and Moby."

IS THIS STILL A METAL ALBUM WE'RE TALKING ABOUT?
"Absolutely, it's heavy as balls! We wanted to have the album cover be a ballsack with three balls in there. An extra helping of balls! We're While She Sleeps and we're always going to be heavy, but we don't want to repeat ourselves. We actually made a rule that we would only put stuff in if it scared us. And some of these songs have got us all pretty nervous, but that's exciting! That's how music progresses! Too many of our bands are happy to tread water, and we're not going to do that – we're going to whip our balls out and put them on the table."

AND, AFTER THE SUCCESS OF THE LAST ALBUM, CAN WHILE SHE SLEEPS STILL GET TO THE TOP OF THE UK METAL PILE?
"I don't want to sound arrogant, but I think so. We want to. I'm not interested in being a cult band, I look at bands like Green Day and see how they've developed from a punk band into what they are now, and I think that's fascinating. Who wouldn't be seduced by the idea of growing like that? It's definitely the goal for us; we want to be one of the definitive bands of this generation." ✠

THE NEW WHILE SHE SLEEPS ALBUM IS EXPECTED EARLY NEXT YEAR

Six Audio is home sweet home for the Sleeps boys

WSS albums are like boxes of chocolates – you never know what you're gonna get

ANTHRAX

I AM THE LAW

Scott Ian delves inside the comic-powered song that took the thrash icons to greatness

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • ILLUSTRATION: MARK LEARY

METAL'S STRONG BOND with the world of comics has endured for decades now, but it's hard to argue against the most significant crossover of all being Anthrax's immortal *I Am The Law*. A thunderous tribute to UK comic *2000 AD*'s most famous character, Judge Dredd, it provided guitarist Scott Ian with the perfect opportunity to indulge a newfound love. Scott discovered Dredd after visiting London's Forbidden Planet store while on a promo trip for second album *Spreading The Disease* in early '86.

"The artwork looked so amazing and Dredd was so fucking cool," Scott recalls. "I picked up a few copies and every time I was in the UK I'd hit up more comic shops looking for it. It was impossible to find in the States. I went to Forbidden Planet in NYC and I said, 'You guys don't carry *2000 AD*?' and they said, 'No, it's really hard for us to import…' Because of me badgering them, they ended up getting a couple of copies every month and holding them for me. I was paying five times the price for them and I'm pretty sure they were pocketing the money, but I just needed my Judge Dredd fix."

Anthrax were in a strong position as they approached the making of their third album, *Among The Living*. A prominent force in the burgeoning thrash metal scene, their previous two albums had received widespread acclaim and much was expected of the next. Prior to hitting the studio, the band famously toured Europe as main support to Metallica, a tour during which Metallica bassist Cliff Burton tragically died. That experience was reflected in Scott's lyrics for new epic *A.D.I. (Horror Of It All)*, but the rest of the songs on *Among The Living* were firmly rooted in Scott's many cultural passions.

"On that tour with Metallica, we already had the riffs for *I Am The Law*," he remembers. "It sounded really anthemic, so what better to write about than this comic book character who just *defined* anthemic to me? It just worked. What did I know at the ripe old age of 22 or 23? I knew comics, horror and sci-fi, I knew skateboarding… I didn't really have much life experience. I couldn't really write about heartbreak or a horrible upbringing, because I didn't have those. I was just writing about what I knew."

ALONGSIDE SCOTT'S TRIBUTE to Judge Dredd, *Among The Living* boasted songs inspired by Stephen King's novel *The Stand* (*Among The Living*), novella *Apt Pupil* (*A Skeleton In The Closet*) and the life and death of comedian John Belushi (*Efilnikufesin (N.F.L.)*), but it was *I Am The Law* that stood out as both the new record's biggest anthem and its most obvious single. For Scott, the decision to release it in advance of the album made perfect sense, just as long as Anthrax could secure *that* artwork.

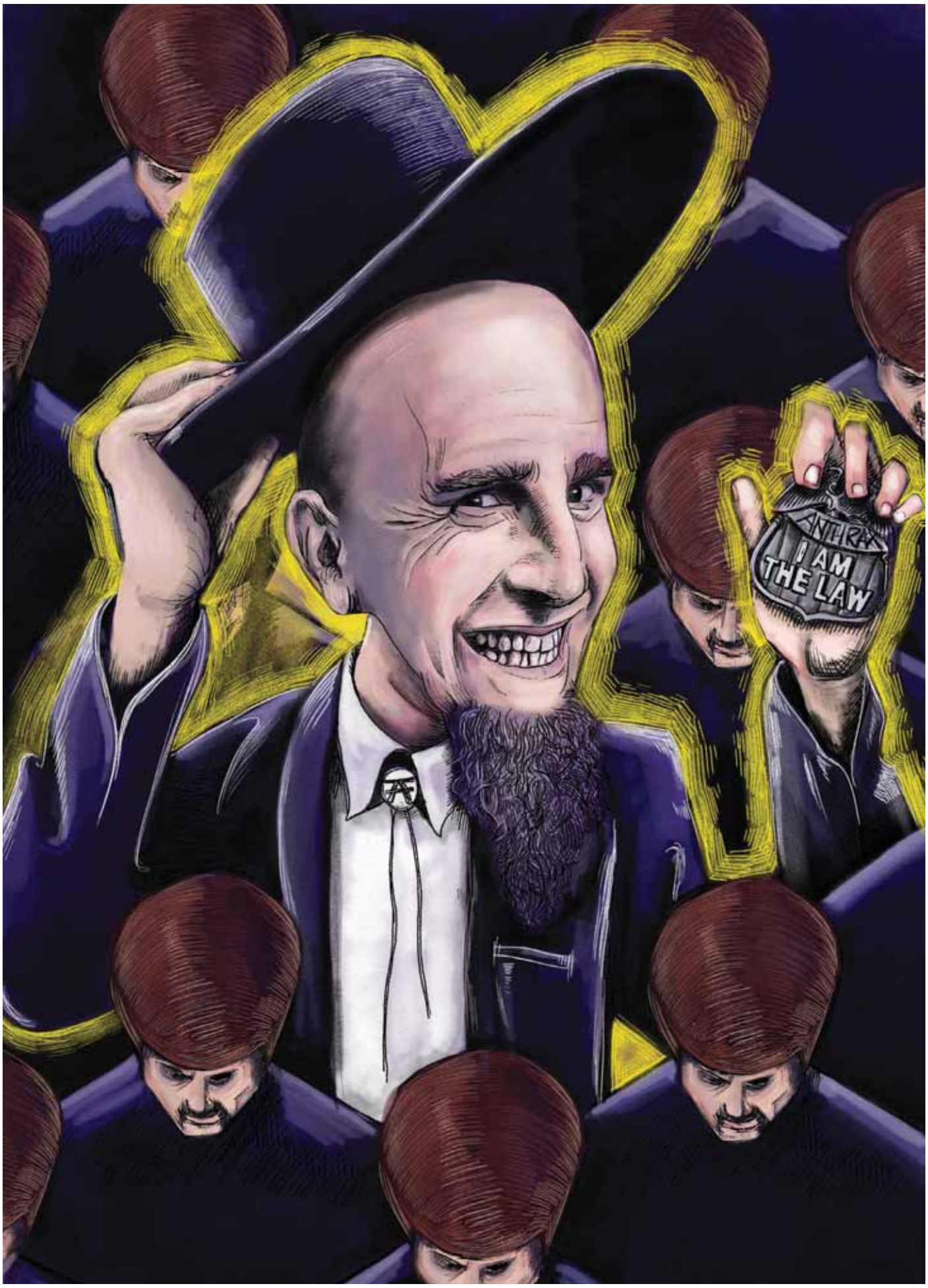
"Either the label or our merch company contacted whoever owned the rights to the Dredd artwork, because we *had* to have it," he avows. "Surprisingly enough, they were amazingly open and cool about it. They didn't ask for some large amount of money for the licensing and they were really excited and happy that we wanted to promote their character, especially in the US where Dredd was a relative unknown. Still to this day, whenever we want to do anything Dredd-related on a t-shirt, they're always very cool about it."

Released a few weeks before *Among The Living* hit the streets, *I Am The Law* defied the odds by breaching the UK Top 40 singles chart, peaking at Number 32. Anthrax's already considerable UK fanbase could hardly have been more impressed, and within weeks of the album's release, the New Yorkers were performing at the legendary Monsters Of Rock festival at Castle Donington and watching *I Am The Law* send the vast crowd into a state of mud-hurling insanity. More than three decades later, Scott Ian is still playing *I Am The Law* at every Anthrax show and he sees no reason to stop.

"I just think it's a great song that still holds up," he asserts. "I think that's what's great about *any* classic song. You just don't get tired of them. That's how I feel, as the guy who has to play it over and over again. There are many songs in our set that come and go but if we play *I Am The Law* at every show between now and the end of Anthrax, I wouldn't have a problem with that. As soon as I bust into that riff, I can't help but be happy." ✠

"I PAID FIVES TIMES THE ASKING PRICE FOR DREDD STUFF"

ANTHRAX'S NEW LIVE ALBUM, *KINGS AMONG SCOTLAND*, IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. THEY HIT THE UK WITH SLAYER, LAMB OF GOD AND OBITUARY THIS NOVEMBER – SEE P.109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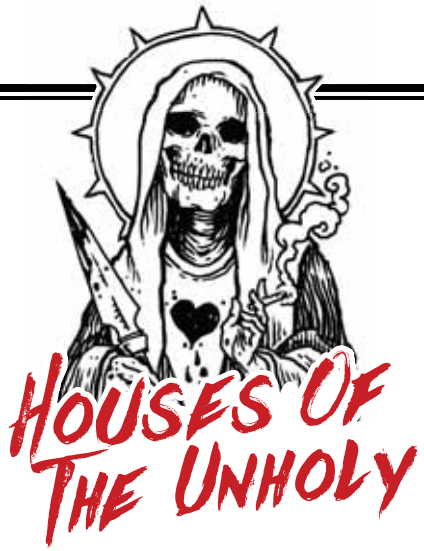
THE LAW



ROB VAN DER LOO

EPICA

Epica's bassist is obsessed with a certain shaven-horned comic book hero

WORDS: ALI COOPER • PICS: BRIAN VAN RENSEN

YOU'VE GOT QUITE THE HELLBOY COLLECTION THERE, ROB! WHEN DID IT ALL START?

"It all started with the first movie back in 2004. I was already a big fan of [director and screenplay writer] Guillermo del Toro's work, but back then I didn't even know *Hellboy* was based on a comic! I accidentally bumped into the first three comics translated into Dutch in a book store one day and I fell in love with the cover design even though I'd never heard of *Hellboy* artist Mike Mignola – which just sounds so blasphemous to me now! I went back to buy the whole storyline in English right away, then I got hooked on the special editions and all the spin-off stories, *B.P.R.D.*, *Abe Sapien* and *Witchfinder*."

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THE HELLBOY CHARACTER HIMSELF?

"I like the idea that he was born as the son of the devil and he chose to be the good guy. I like his personality because he's quite grumpy with a good sense of humour, the guy with a big mouth and a small heart. These days I prefer the comics to the movies but whenever I read Hellboy in the comics, I hear [Hellboy actor] Ron Perlman's voice."

"WHEN I SAW THE HELLBOY MOVIE, I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW IT WAS BASED ON A COMIC!"

WHERE IS THIS AWESOME COLLECTION KEPT?

"Right now, most of my things are kept in my home studio but I have a lot of stuff still in the basement because I want to keep them away from the light. I have at least 12 original Hellboy pages and I need to get them special frames with UV light protection glass so I can display them in the living room. Thank god my wife loves it, too!"

WHERE DO YOU DISCOVER MOST OF YOUR ITEMS?

"Local comic stores and Comic Cons are where people have a real passion for what they do. They may be a little more expensive than online auction sites, but local stores support you and let you check things out before you buy, you don't get damaged items and sometimes you get surprises, too. I went into my local store to place an order and they gave me a Batman story drawn by Mike Mignola for free because I'm a good customer – that's what I call good service!"

WHICH IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE PIECE IN YOUR COLLECTION?

"I have this Hellboy statue made by a French company, Fariboles, and back in the day I bought it for €500. Now it's worth €2,000!"

WHAT ABOUT YOUR MOST *EMOTIONALLY* VALUABLE PIECE?

"The drawing I got from Mike Mignola himself. I just emailed him saying I'm a big fan and pieces on eBay are so expensive, it's almost impossible to get anything and he recently made some sketches at home and he didn't know what to do with them so he sent me one! I was nervous about contacting him but he's a person, too."

HAS TOURING COME IN HANDY FOR FINDING SPECIAL PIECES?

"We once played Auckland, New Zealand and I looked for the local comic store as I always do and I saw they had a *Witchfinder* page on the wall. The owner insisted it wasn't for sale because he was friends with the artist, Ben Stenbeck, and he made it for him – he only lived around the corner from the shop. That's how I got in touch with Stenbeck and he's the first artist I bought a *Hellboy* page from."

ON A SCALE OF 1-10, HOW METAL IS YOUR HELLBOY COLLECTION?

"It's a 10! I spoke to a few of the artists who worked for Mike Mignola who may be doing some future Epica designs. One of my dreams is to one day release an album with Mike Mignola doing the cover artwork!" ✠

EPICA'S LATEST EP, *EPICA VS ATTACK ON TITAN SONGS*, IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

GET INVOLVED

THE CONNECTIONS

"Try to support your local comic book stores," Rob recommends. "Don't forget they have a big network and they always bump into items you'll never find on eBay." Search www.comicshoplocator.com for a comprehensive global list of independent and chain stores.

THE ARTISTS

Rob's contact with the *Hellboy* artists has helped him expand his collection into rare, one-off pieces. "A lot of people think comic artists are unreachable but sometimes if you just email them asking if they have any stuff for sale, they'll reply."

THE TRACKER

Keeping track of the comics you own gets more difficult the more you accumulate. The League Of Comic Geeks website (www.leagueofcomicgeeks.com) allows you to manually input the details of all your comics, group them by series to avoid buying duplicates and post reviews.

SKYND

When we heard there was a new, bizarre, Jonathan Davis-approved duo scaring the shit out of the underground, we decided to investigate. Things got… *weird*

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PIC: MICK HUTSON

SOUNDS LIKE:
A glitchy, industrial nightmare

FOR FANS OF:
Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, 3Teeth

LISTEN TO:
Elisa Lam

A BARE SPOTLIGHT illuminates four chairs in the centre of a dungeon. In one sits a man in a hoodie and a gimp mask with the mouth sewn up. In another sits a woman with her hair scraped up into a black-blonde topknot, her outfit part catwalk, part fetish club, impenetrable black contact lenses covering her eyes. In the chair next to her is a doll – her mini-me, she says. The fourth chair is for the interviewer. Or maybe the victim…

The man and the woman are F (him) and Skynd (her) and the latter is who this project is named after. Their music – cold, dehumanized glitch-goth – is a vehicle for a shared fascination with death, serial killers and the darkness inside all of us.

"My biggest fascination is the evil aspect of the human psyche," says Skynd, her whispered voice tinged with an accent that might be French, Swiss, Swedish or none of the above. "We're all capable of doing cruel things. Inhumane things…"

Skynd (the band) aren't big on real-life details. Skynd (the person) will reveal that she and F met at a party in the Australian bush in a few years ago. "He was rocking back and forth on a stone, I wondered what he was doing," she says. "But we talked and I felt this magical connection. This twin flame."

"She was the only person talking to me. I liked her from the first moment," says F, his thick middle-European accent muffled by his mask. It's not clear what the initial stands for – Father? Fucker? But he's not saying. In fact, he's not saying much at all.

ALL THIS WEIRDNESS bleeds through the duo's debut single, *Elisa Lam*, a slice of harsh, nocturnal electronic noise featuring an alternately distorted and childlike vocal from Skynd. It was inspired by the death of a student named Elisa Lam, whose body was found in the water tank of a Los Angeles hotel. Her demise – and how she ended up in the tank – is a mystery. Or maybe it isn't.

"She played the Korean elevator game," says Skynd, referencing an infamous urban myth. "You play it in a building with more than 10 floors. There's a code you have to press – 4, 2, 6, 2, 10, 5, 1. On the 10th floor there's a dark lady. If you look at her, she will take you to hell."

The name Skynd comes from an imaginary friend the singer has had since she was a child. "I saw him for the first time when I was three," she says. "He was sitting under my grandparents' kitchen table. But he is the one showing me that evil lies in all of us, and it's all around us."

"MY BIGGEST FASCINATION IS EVIL"

What does he look like?

"He was a normal boy, actually. He has changed a lot, drastically. He has blue-ish skin now. He looks really sick at the moment."

What are your real names? Skynd just smiles, blankly.

"Skynd."

Where are you from?

"From a dark place."

F, why do you wear a mask?

Skynd: "You should not ask him that question."

F: "Because I don't like my face."

Why? What's wrong with your face?

F: "I just don't like it."

This sense of theatre perfectly suits Skynd and their weird, otherworldly songs. It's attracted the attention of Korn's Jonathan Davis, a likeminded soul who duets with the band on forthcoming single *Gary Heidnik*.

"Yeah, Skynd's weird," laughs the Korn legend when we ask him how their collaboration came together. "But she's awesome! They sent the project to be mixed by one of my guys, Eric Racy. He goes, 'Dude, I got something I think would be right up your alley, check this shit out.' I was like, 'This shit's dark, I love it.' And so from there, I got the track, and I sang! Then they added me into the video, and I think it's really cool. It's very different."

Like *Elisa Lam, Gary Heidnik* takes its inspiration from a grisly real-life event. Heidnik abducted, tortured and raped six women between 1986 and 1987 in the basement of his house in Philadelphia, killing two of them.

"He wanted to make a baby farm with them, which is pretty sick," whispers Skynd. "He was some kind of priest. He thought he was doing something good. That's just sick. I had to write a song about him."

Do you admire it or does it disturb you?

"It disturbs me. Of course it does. I don't admire it at all."

Like Marilyn Manson and Slipknot before them, Skynd are disturbingly brilliant and brilliantly disturbing. Death, darkness and serial killers are hardly fresh ground for a band to cover, but few address it so chillingly and as convincingly as they do. Step into their dark world. What's the worst that could happen? ✠

SKYND'S DEBUT ALBUM IS EXPECTED LATER THIS YEAR

Skynd: "Bring out the gimp! Oh, he's already here"

Black Fast: no compromise, no restrictions

PIC: KENNY WILLIAMSON

BLACK FAST

Power Trip may have kicked the door down for thrash's next wave, but Black Fast are taking it to gnarlier new realms

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

SOUNDS LIKE:
Dirty, raging thrash with a side order of deathly hostility

FOR FANS OF:
Kreator, Power Trip, Vektor

LISTEN TO:
Cloak Of Lies

FROM METALLICA TO Municipal Waste, thrash metal has been the boiling-hot lifeblood of our world for more than three decades now. Unlike many subgenres, however, thrash never seems to run out of creative steam or suffer from a lack of fresh takes on that original, immaculate blueprint. Hailing from St. Louis, Missouri, and armed with more face-slicing riffs than anyone could possibly need, Black Fast may not be reinventing the wheel, but their rabid, swivel-eyed and distinctly grubby approach to thrash fucking metal is an invigorating slap around the face nonetheless. So far, the band have found that pretty much everyone is enjoying the experience.

"Let's just say that over the last three or four years, we haven't run into a lot of rooms that hated us!" laughs guitarist and frontman Aaron Akin. "We've played with various kinds of bands and there's usually a crossover appeal or connection."

In the same way Power Trip have endeared themselves to European audiences with a sound that is both fresh and familiar, Black Fast do everything that we require a thrash metal band to do, but without ever losing their own distinctive vibe. New album *Spectre Of Ruin* owes an undeniable debt to the German thrash scene of the 80s, but there are lots of other, less easily identified influences being hurled into the deafening maelstrom, too.

"I come from Van Halen, Metallica, Pantera and Slayer, but by about ninth grade I was listening to more European stuff," Aaron recalls. "I was heavily into Kreator as a teenager. Trevor [Johanson, guitar] pretty much exclusively listened to [Dimmu-affiliated black metallers] Old Man's Child when he was delivering pizza in high school. He was terrifying the neighbourhood! Ha ha ha! But the truth is that we don't have any restrictions."

"THIS BAND HAS NO RESTRICTIONS"

AS AARON EXPLAINS, he and Trevor have been jamming together for the best part of a decade. Black Fast was formed in 2010, with no expectations beyond making some cool music and jamming with friends. After releasing a debut EP in 2011 and first album *Starving Out The Light* in 2013, the band's music started to be muttered about in music industry circles. Much to their surprise, Black Fast were snapped up by big indie imprint eOne Music, home to numerous modern metal acts, but arguably not the most obvious fit for Aaron's evil thrash crew.

"I was totally shocked and didn't really even know what that was gonna mean!" he says, chuckling at the memory. "It was so far outside of what we set out to do, you know? We'd still be doing the same thing in our little town, recording EPs at our local studio. But it's a very fortunate event that it *did* happen, because we've had all these opportunities that we otherwise wouldn't have had."

The imminent release of *Spectre Of Ruin* looks certain to push Black Fast further towards the metal mainstream, but don't expect the band to compromise on the brutality of their music *or* the bleak and bruising ethos that lurks within it. Black Fast's core message seems to be that mankind will inevitably destroy itself and we probably deserve it. As ever, thrash continues to hit the nail on the head like nothing else.

"If you take a broad view of it, what I try to do is paint an image of despair in general," he states. "It's not political and it's not necessarily about anything that's happening right now. I'm saying that the *whole* picture is awful. Anything crazy happening now is just validating what I'm saying and probably connecting dots for people. Mankind will probably destroy itself." ✠

***SPECTRE OF RUIN* IS OUT NOW VIA EONE MUSIC**

hmv RECOMMENDED

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Rituals
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The mighty Deaf Havana are back with their fifth studio album, the follow-up to their Top 5 album All These Countless Nights.

Moonspell
Lisboa Under The Spell
out 17 August on CD & vinyl
With this epic performance Moonspell once again showcase their reputation as one of Europe's best live bands.

NOFX
Ribbed: Live In A Dive
out 17 August on CD & vinyl
One of the biggest names in punk rock now unleash, as the name suggests, a live version of their classic 1991 record Ribbed.

Alice In Chains
Rainier Fog
out 24 August on CD & vinyl
First album in five years from the legendary band. Includes So Far Under and The One You Know.

Wilson
Tasty Nasty
out 24 August on CD
With no inhibitions holding them back, Wilson embark on a journey through nostalgia and endearing nonsense on these eleven new tracks.

The Barstool Preachers
Grazie Governo
out 24 August on CD & vinyl
Brighton's finest return with their second album that's a superb blend of ska, punk and everything in between.

Mantar - The Modern Art Of Setting Ablaze
out 24 August on CD & vinyl
Twelve more slabs of blackened doom punk from the feral German duo.

The Vintage Caravan
Gateways
out 31 August on CD & vinyl
The Icelandic classic rock trio return with their fourth studio album, produced by Ian Davenport (Band Of Skulls).

Black Mirrors
Look Into The Black Mirror
out 31 August on CD & vinyl
This is a prime example of all the wonderful stuff that can happen when you sell your soul to garage rock, blues, psychedelia and stoner rock.

Thou
Magus
out 31 August on CD & vinyl
While sonically, Magus may be a continuation of previous album Heathen, thematically it is a journey beyond the principles of pleasure and pain.

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Lotus Eater: you'll love them when they're angry

LOTUS EATER

This disgustingly brutal tech metal crew are writing the soundtrack to your nightmares

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

SOUNDS LIKE:
Groovy, nasty technically minded filth

FOR FANS OF:
Loathe, From Sorrow To Serenity, Harbinger

LISTEN TO:
Branded

"FROM AN OUTSIDER'S point of view, Glasgow isn't a welcoming place," admits Lotus Eater guitarist Alan Ross. "But we're the nicest people. We might stab you but we'll phone you an ambulance as well!"

Musically and lyrically, confrontation is the name of Lotus Eater's game. Even though they are still very much in their early stages, this tech-metal quartet have got hella lofty ambitions. Recently, they became the first heavy UK band to be signed by California-based label Hopeless, the home of massive names like Avenged Sevenfold and All Time Low over the years. It's a huge coup for an aggressive young band, hewn from the mean, grey streets of Scotland's biggest city.

"I'm sure people have an image of Glasgow in their head and it works really well that we portray something similar in our music," says Alan. "Glasgow is the backdrop for it, it sets the theme..."

Although they formed years before as post-rock outfit As Daylight Fades, when current vocalist Jamie McLees joined the line-up it was clear things had to change. All of a sudden there was a darker, more sordid vibe penetrating the songwriting for what would become Lotus Eater's self-titled 2017 EP: five tracks of uneasy listening, unhinged guitars and harrowing grooves.

"We realised that the stuff we were writing wouldn't really fit [As Daylight Fades'] style so we decided why don't we just go for something totally different," says Alan. "That's how it all started really, we realised what we were doing was something a bit different so we started pushing that."

IT'S FAIR TO say Lotus Eater's bleak and filthy cacophony is some of the nastiest tech metal *Hammer* has heard in a long time. The band, on the other hand, prefer to label their music simply as 'gloom'. On the track *Kin*, amid nightmarish tones and a sheer battery of percussion, Jamie bellows maniacally: *"My mental state is fucked... Wounded by violence."* Latest single *Branded*, however, wields its grooves like an axe, with Jamie screaming blue murder over bludgeoning riffs, dissecting painful memories and reopening unhealed wounds; *"The grip you had on me / Fixating on my weakness / Kill the bully / Kill him faster."* It's unnervingly intimidating stuff.

"When we started we didn't have a plan for how we wanted to come across, but over time, especially the first few months, we realised that was how people felt about it," says Alan. "We quite enjoy it actually. If you watch videos of us live we seem quite angry, but we actually are nice people! We all just decided fuck it, we wanted to make it more personable. Musically, we just want to translate the weirdest, angriest, heavy stuff we can."

That kind of bloody-minded goal might not usually correlate with huge household name success, but Lotus Eater aren't the kind of band who'll be content making a racket in the corner of your local boozer. Fresh off a tour with a newly energised Heart Of A Coward and fellow Glaswegians From Sorrow To Serenity, a solid run of barking at packed rooms has whipped up a thirst that won't be easily quenched.

"The tech metal scene in Glasgow, is a wee bit niche," says Alan. "I'm not worried about the scene dying but I'd still like to see more bands trying to give it a go. The more bands there are, the more shows there's going to be. We want to take it as far as we can and headline shows in the UK and Europe comfortably. I know every band says this but we genuinely want to tour with Slipknot. We're working towards that."

Don't bet against them. ✠

LOTUS EATER'S DEBUT EP IS DUE OUT THIS AUTUMN VIA HOPELESS

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Khemmis: embracing the darkness

KHEMMIS

Doom metal with melodies so rich they'd make Maiden look twice? Khemmis are toying with one of metal's most ancient formulas

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

SOUNDS LIKE:
Fighting a dragon and drowning in the swamp of despair, simultaneously.

FOR FANS OF:
Pallbearer, Iron Maiden, At The Gates

LISTEN TO:
Isolation

DOOM METAL HAS maintained a consistent sonic aesthetic which, for its many variations, can almost always be traced back to the first wail of guitar on Black Sabbath's eponymous opening track in 1970. Denver doom quartet Khemmis take their cues from a very different pool of inspiration, however. "Stick Thin Lizzy or Iron Maiden in a tar pit and watch them struggle to play those dual melodies… that's the effect we're going for," grins Phil Pendergast, one half of the band's vocal/guitar assault. As far as images go, it's provocative yet effective, perfectly capturing the disparate dynamic of hopelessness and epic bombast that Khemmis evoke. This is particularly evident on *Desolation*, the band's third record and an enormous leap forward in craft, drawing inspiration from everything from Judas Priest's *Stained Class* to Merciful Fate's *Melissa* to create something simultaneously progressive yet purist in essence.

"We wanted to make a record that felt like one of those that inspired us," explains Phil. "We were having a hard time in our personal lives, so to be able to go back and take inspiration from the records that baptised us in this heavy metal thing we love and care about was therapeutic, in a way."

Khemmis have a history of using personal strife as fuel for the emotional fire that propels them forwards, stemming from an experience Phil once endured while he was indulging in psychedelics. "I had a really bad experience," he says." I ended up breaking my jaw and almost biting my tongue off. It was the most terrifying thing that ever happened to me, but it was also very surreal. It felt like I'd activated a darker side of my brain, which is really conducive to writing this kind of music!"

BUT, WHILE THE band have always erred towards the side of darkness, Phil admits that *Desolation* goes even deeper still. "I don't want to get into it too much, because I can't speak for the other guys," Phil explains. "But some of us lost family members; we were struggling with fears about our mental health and I was trying to finish a dissertation for my PhD. We were all experiencing setbacks in our personal lives. Culturally, it's also a very difficult time to be in the US and that compounds everything you feel on a personal level. It leaves you feeling alone, like you're the only person who sees the world in the way you do."

Doom isn't exactly known for its feelgood qualities, but there's no denying that the genre offers a sense of emotional catharsis. It is this catharsis that Khemmis tap into with *Desolation*, mixing it with the communal spirit of heavy metal to offer a sense of rebellious victory. "There was a lot of grief and anger, so we felt really motivated to kick everyone's ass with this new record" Phil agrees. "We wanted to go more aggressive and extreme, but also more 'fist in the air' metal than we'd ever been before. *Desolation* plays out in my mind like a cycle of grief. It starts out hopeless and lost, and ends on this note of acceptance and resolution, getting darker along the way."

By embracing this darkness, Khemmis are able to offer… not quite *comfort*, but the same sense of respite one might get as they accept they are drowning at the bottom of an ocean. It is the ultimate expression of inevitability and release; of finding solace in the looming darkness. And lord knows, there's plenty of it about. ✠

"WE'RE LIKE WATCHING THIN LIZZY IN A TAR PIT"

***DESOLATION* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST RECORDS**

THE FIVE HUNDRED

What happens when OCD threatens to cripple your first steps into music? You channel it to create something special

The Five Hundred: when life hands you lemons, make heavy fucking metal

WORDS: ALI COOPER

SOUNDS LIKE:
Eddie Vedder bumping into While She Sleeps in a dark alley

FOR FANS OF:
Architects, Killswitch Engage, Heart Of A Coward

LISTEN TO:
Smoke And Mirrors

WHEN GIBRALTAR-BASED METALHEADS Mark Byrne and Andy Crawford outgrew the heavy scene of their Mediterranean domain, they set their sights on sunny, er, Nottingham as their new home, bringing in the area's most talented metal musicians to form The Five Hundred.

With a sound combining the sultry tones of 90s grunge vocals and the relentless riffage of Sikth and Architects, The Five Hundred are breaking the restrictive mould melodic metal made for itself.

"Our vocalist Johnathan [Woods-Eley] is a 90s grunge kid like Chris Cornell, and I'm into Meshuggah," guitarist Mark explains, "so when you hear his clean vocals over our guitars, you hear that haunting, dejected feeling you'd find in bleak grunge."

The guys have faced their fair share of adversity, from drink and drug addictions to crippling mental health issues that have put their love of metal and their instruments to the test. Guitarist Paul Doughty has taken on both physical tics from Tourette's Syndrome and extreme obsessive compulsive disorder and transformed them into his musical strengths rather than obstacles.

"Like any creative genius in the history books, Paul's OCD is his Shakespearean artistic flaw," Mark explains. "In his early 20s, he couldn't leave the house without washing his hands 17 times, so he channelled it in a positive way by picking up a guitar. He'd become obsessed with Dream Theater and Avenged Sevenfold solos so he'd play them over and over for five hours every night until he nailed them – when he came into rehearsal the next day, he'd start playing and our jaws would drop."

Bassist Andy, meanwhile, openly admits his past problems with gambling, initiated by his first full-time job in a betting shop, highlighting the oft-ignored yet debilitating addiction.

"Gambling is a real issue that isn't spoken about – while rock'n'roll lives of drink and drugs are well known, nobody mentions gambling. All I was doing was chasing that high of winning, which is how I've been able to focus on music in the same way instead."

THEIR DEBUT ALBUM, *Bleed Red*, focuses on the psychological factors of addiction that alter the human mind – from ignorance to hysteria – with each track depicting a different destructive aspect that the band have tackled first-hand. The therapeutic songwriting process for the album has brought the band a much-needed closure to catalogue their personal battles.

"Some people get into martial arts or fitness, some get into drink and drugs to escape the shit life throws at them. For us, we have chosen to throw ourselves into our music and used it as a way of venting all the crap that builds up."

Pulling in renowned producer Justin Hill [Sikth, Heart Of A Coward] who worked on their first two EPs, their debut full-length soon became a beast, tamed only by the co-operative writing approach of the bandmates.

"We don't feel the vocalist needs to write their own lyrics or the guitarist needs to write their own riffs," Mark states. "I love playing guitar and writing riffs but Andy has more of a knack at putting songs together, plus I seem to have a way with words so I write a lot of our lyrics."

Ultimately, The Five Hundred are chasing the thrill that metal gave them growing up by forging their own distinct brand, and facing down their demons in the process.

"I've always got an accomplished feeling from music, even when I was in my teens listening to Slipknot when dealing with personal troubles," Mark adds. "After listening to *Surfacing*, everything immediately felt better. I wanted to be the guy who made those horrible sounds in music." ✠

"HE COULDN'T LEAVE THE HOUSE WITHOUT WASHING HIS HANDS 17 TIMES"

***BLEED RED* IS OUT NOW VIA LONG BRANCH**

MSRY: see? Health and safety nightmare! Get out of the bloody road, guys!

MSRY

Their violent shows are becoming the talk of the scene, but this is not your Average Angry Hardcore Band

WORDS: JAMES WEAVER

SOUNDS LIKE:
Visceral and menacing hardcore that packs a serious punch

FOR FANS OF:
Cancer Bats, Stray From The Path, Every Time I Die

LISTEN TO:
Freedom

THE EXPERIENCE OF a hardcore show is living life on the very edge. Heavy music's most exhilarating and adrenaline-pumping subgenre demands movement, which often comes at a cost to your own well-being. Oxford's MSRY know this all too well and, despite sticking true to what hardcore demands, the title of their forthcoming EP, *Safety First*, is a tongue-in-cheek nod to the disregard of our safety when at heavy music shows.

"We are a health and safety hazard at the best of times for any venue or promoter, we are awful!" laughs vocalist Kial Churcher. "There is an ironic, tongue-in-cheek nature to it, because we are not the most serious people in the world. We try not take *anything* that seriously. So we thought if this EP had that humour right from the get-go, people will get that we are not just this serious hardcore band where we just cross our arms in promo photos and we're angry all the time about everything; we've got such a lighter side to us outside of the music. I feel it gives it a bit of personality to the record."

THIS WELL-PLACED IRONY and laughable side to MSRY makes the rising trio instantly likeable, but at their core lies an aggressive beast. The afore-mentioned *Safety First* is a gut-wrenching affair, pulling inspiration from the depths of misery and covering subjects like Brexit, Donald Trump and your own inner demons to channel the noise into an explosive release. Kial explains that while he wouldn't necessarily see MSRY as a political band, these were subject matters that needed addressing.

"It actually wasn't too hard [writing on political subjects], we've got a lot of things to say even though we're not outright political people. There's a lot of pent-up frustration that we weren't able to get out on the first EP. That first EP was very much us coming together and writing music and having an emotional edge to what we were feeling at the time. From day one we had a lot of things we wanted to say and a lot of stuff that we couldn't bring ourselves to say in lyrical format in any of our other bands."

But to survive in the hardcore scene you need so much more than just great songs with deep meaning, and thankfully for MSRY, they have that in buckets. With little thought or precaution for their safety, the band are forging an incendiary live reputation, and for Kial, this is where it matters.

"From the start me and Keir [French, drums] were watching bands like The Chariot or Every Time I Die or The Dillinger Escape Plan or Letlive. They were the pinnacle of a live show to us. We said we wanted shows like that, shows that were chaos and were absolutely insane, shows that people would away from and go, 'What the hell have I just seen?' Don't get me wrong, we love having killer riffs and memorable parts of our songs, but the stage is where we really thrive." ✠

"THIS BAND IS A HEALTH AND SAFETY HAZARD"

***SAFETY FIRST* IS OUT NOW**

NEW NOISE ROUND-UP

MORE YOUNG BLOOD YOU NEED IN YOUR LIFE

URNE

From the ashes of similarly ace UK crew Hang The Bastard come this none-heavier three piece who deal in fuzz-tinged walls of riffage. Fans of Mastodon and Black Sabbath should check them out.

LISTEN TO: *Dust Atlas*

SONS OF ALPHA CENTAURI

If the name sounds familiar, that's because it probably is – 10 years after their critically acclaimed debut, these space-prog-post-metallers have rebooted and are back with a new album, *Continuum*.

LISTEN TO: *I0*

BLACK WATER CHEMISTRY

These Welsh metallers meld death-tinged metalcore riffs with ambient midsections and the occasional touch of djent-primed technicality. You can listen to their ace new EP this month.

LISTEN TO: *Return To Ashes*

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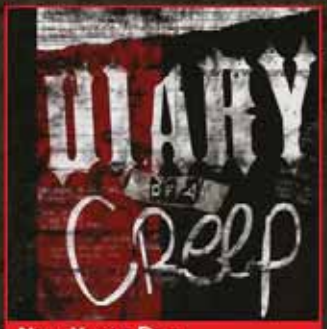

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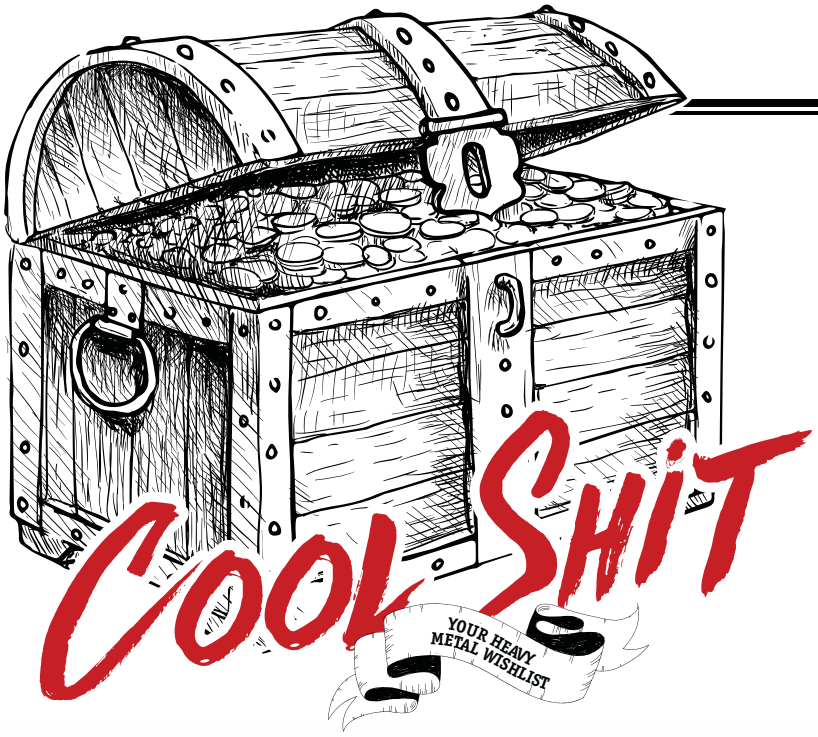

SEVENTH CIRCLE OCCULT T-SHIRT

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Back due to popular demand, this stunning design by artist Chloe Pye for renowned ring and pendant makers Seventh Circle Artworks is available in men's and women's tees, and a woman's tank top to boot.

http://tinyurl.com/occult-tee

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Stalk your local hunting grounds like a true horror movie diva with this brilliantly schlocky tank top. Not only are you paying tribute to Fay Wray, Janet Leigh and more, it's also the perfect top to wear when pulling faces to the latest episode of *Love Island*.

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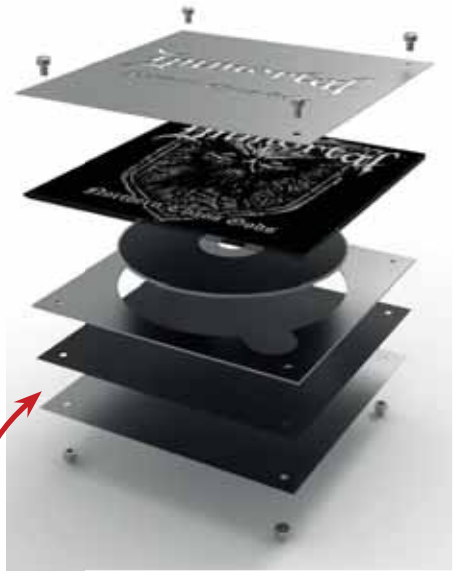

IMMORTAL *NORTHERN CHAOS GODS* METAL CASE

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Nine years and a lot of drama after an album last came out under the Immortal banner, *Northern Chaos Gods* has proved that Demonaz and Horgh can still write immediate, blizzard-blasted anthems. This bolted, metal version is the only excuse for saying it's hard to get into.

http://tinyurl.com/immortal-metal

PALE MAN ENAMEL PIN BADGE

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Guillermo del Toro is one of this millennium's most gifted and imaginative film makers, and 2006's *Pan's Labyrinth* is rightly regarded as his masterpiece. Fans of his darkly fantastic yet deeply allegorical world can wear this pin badge of the terrifying, fairy-chomping Pale Man character to show their love of the cult classic.

http://tinyurl.com/pale-man-pin

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HTTP://TINYURL.COM/COHEED-BOX

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http://tinyurl.com/colour-me-red

SKYHARBOR HOODY

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A collaborative venture that, geographically, spans India and the US, Skyharbor have the kind of sonic reach that suggests the entire universe is their playground. Apt, then, that this hoody for their new album, *Sunshine Dust*, is emblazoned with a stunning mandala design.

http://tinyurl.com/skyharbor-hoody

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Harry Potter fans love a bit of role play, constantly pretending that they're attending Hogwarts with all manner of branding stuff. Now with this Potter-themed toiletry bag they can pull their toothbrush out and shout "Expelliarmus!" at will.

http://tinyurl.com/hpotter-bag

BLACK PEAKS T-SHIRT

£15

Brighton-based post-metal quartet Black Peaks have a much-anticipated sophomore album coming out this year, and we've heard it. We're not going to tell you how good it is, but let's just say you might want to invest in this t-shirt before they go stratospheric.

http://tinyurl.com/black-peaks-tee

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JURASSIC PARK JACKET

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We're big fans of the new, re-booted *Jurassic World* movies but, let's be honest, nothing beats the original. If you agree then you'll want to get your hands on one of these varsity jackets. If it doesn't fit you, don't worry, life finds a way.

http://tinyurl.com/jurassic-jacket

VEIN T-SHIRT

£12.15

Vein are one of the best young bands on planet Earth, and their recent debut album *Errorzone* isn't leaving our stereo anytime in the near future. So we're definitely keen on showing our love for them with this t-shirt.

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HOW DAVID DRAIMAN GOT THE LAST LAUGH

He's spent two decades being metal's living punchline. Now, David Draiman is ready to lead Disturbed into the album that could seal their status as one of the 21st century's biggest bands. And who could have seen *that* coming?

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

Suited and booted, a photo David can be proud to show his mom

David Draiman is staring at us. Not with the chest-beating conviction he channels onstage, but with the nervous expectation of a newborn deer, because we're about to remind him of some old interview quotes. In 2002, before the release of second album *Believe*, he was describing the acoustic song *Darkness* to *Metal Hammer* when he threatened to "kill anyone who terms it a ballad".

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!" Today's David Draiman erupts with laughter, eyes crinkling at the sides. "Oh my god, the things we say when we're young. That's putting on such a front! Oy David, what did you do? I listen to some of the stuff I said back in the day, and it makes me cringe. But back then, no one was accepting of ballads. I was obviously way too cocky for my own good, and was so defensive. Maybe that's what people picked up on, and they took it the wrong way."

We have been talking about the reputation Disturbed have garnered since they broke into metal's consciousness with the distinctive monkey noises and punchy hooks of 2000's debut *The Sickness*. Whether it was his "cocky" remarks, the angry, unfiltered nature of his lyrics that were at odds with some of metal's establishment – though totally in keeping with nu metal's posturing – or his famous chin piercings, he became caricatured in the press and sidelined by old-school genre fans for years to come. And yet, Disturbed defied the haters to become one of the biggest metal bands in the world.

In the States, they've had five consecutive albums debut at Number One – an achievement bettered only by Metallica and normie rockers the Dave Matthews Band. They regularly pull arena crowds. In 2016, following the release of post-hiatus record *Immortalized*, they were the most-played band on rock radio in the US and Canada. Ironically, one particular ballad had a hand in that – their stirring cover of Simon & Garfunkel's *The Sound Of Silence*. It's been certified Double Platinum, and catapulted them onto mega-sized talk show *Conan*. That's not only a metal band getting household exposure, but one whose previous defining song contained the lyric, *'I don't need this shit, you stupid sadistic abusive fucking whore. Would you like to see how it feels, mommy?'* Not only have they built a sizeable fanbase, they've gone mainstream.

"I did have *major* concerns going in," David confesses. "I remember playing the track for a bunch of my colleagues and friends prior to it coming out, very secretively, and really being unsure. They were like, 'Don't be, this is magic. You've got lightning in a bottle here.' I can come off as pretty confident most of the time, but truth be told, I'm my own severe, horrific critic. I can be objective about other people's music, but when it comes to our own, I'm paranoid as fuck."

Today, we are talking in the gardens of West Hollywood's Sunset Marquis hotel, infamous for tales of rock'n'roll excess. These days, it radiates the knowing, polished air of wealth. David is at home here, relaxed, glass of chilled water in hand, periodically wiping his forehead to absorb the moisture created by a 30° sun

blasting through the canopy of trees.

While Disturbed – completed by guitarist Dan Donegan, bassist John Moyer and drummer Mike Wengren – have long been on an upward trajectory, there's a definite sense that *The Sound Of Silence* has changed their lives. Professionally, it's meant straying from their comfort zone. Ten minutes before the *Conan* appearance, filmed with a 24-piece orchestra, David could be found pacing his dressing room, sweating, ravaged by illness and emotionally riddled with nerves.

Disturbed Fire It Up in Oklahoma, May 2016

GETTY

"The other guys were fooling around, and here I am pacing like a maniac, trying to warm up and praying, praying, praying," he remembers. "Because I was trashed vocally that day. I had no idea how it was going to sound. I tried to shut everybody and everything out, and focus on how I felt about the song and where it was taking me, and not worry about the camera. I can play in front of 100,000 people, no issue. That red light comes on on a TV camera, I get nervous. Stomach clenches up, it's a whole different thing. Getting over the level of intimidation was tough."

It's also meant adjusting to a new, unprecedented amount of fame. At the time of writing, the performance has had more than 80million views on YouTube, while the official music video is pushing 405million. That's more than the entire population of the US, and six times the population of the UK.

"Because my face was so front and centre in that video, the recognition factor is amplified. Everywhere I go now. It's a significant difference. I used to be able to just be another bald guy, and now it doesn't happen that way," he says matter-of-factly. "I don't have a problem with it, because everyone's always so very, very respectful. It comes with the territory, and I'm absolutely beyond overwhelmed."

Personally, it's a success David's been able to share with his mother and father, proud pillars of their religious community who he's in LA to visit. "It's surreal to have my parents talking one of my songs up to the neighbours!" he smiles.

"I WAS JUST ANOTHER BALD GUY. IT'S DIFFERENT NOW"

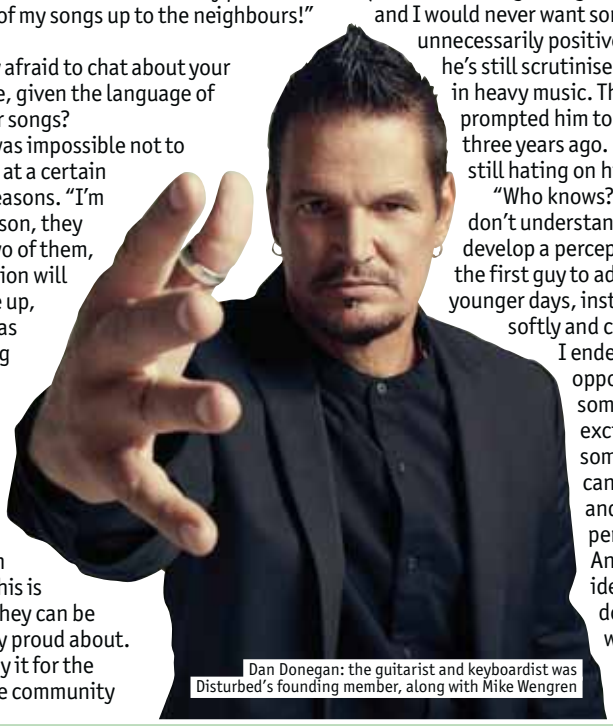
***THE SOUND OF SILENCE* COVER HAS MADE DAVID A HOUSEHOLD NAME**

Were they afraid to chat about your music before, given the language of some of your songs?

"Well, it was impossible not to talk about it at a certain point," he reasons. "I'm their oldest son, they only have two of them, so the question will always come up, and it's just as easy as doing a Google search; it's impossible to hide. And don't get me wrong, they've been proud, but this is something they can be unreservedly proud about. They can play it for the people in the community and be like, 'Oh, that's my son!' Not like, 'Ah… that's my *son*…'"

How does that feel?

"I'm great with it." Twinkle appearing in his eye, he flashes the mischievous smile of Disturbed's mascot, The Guy. "I was great with it before, because there's something to be said about being the black sheep. The rebellious entity within the family, or the one that strayed off the path. I kind of enjoy being that guy."


Dan Donegan: the guitarist and keyboardist was Disturbed's founding member, along with Mike Wengren

But being the black sheep is isolating when it's not on your own terms. Despite Disturbed's accomplishments, David is regularly ridiculed online. While he admits he's done some "dumb things" and has no problem with being called out for legitimate missteps ("There's nothing wrong with objectivity, and I would never want someone to be unnecessarily positively biased either"), he's still scrutinised more than most in heavy music. The exposure prompted him to leave Twitter three years ago. So why are people still hating on him today?

"Who knows?" he says. "I truly don't understand it. I think people develop a perception of you. I'm the first guy to admit that in my younger days, instead of speaking softly and carrying a big stick, I ended up doing the opposite of that. Which sometimes comes from excitement or youth or… sometimes confidence can 'become' arrogance, and certainly be perceived as that. And people have no idea how much self-doubt there is involved with it, and how much questioning you do." >

DUPLIFY

DISTURBED'S COVER SONGS RANKED FROM WORST TO BEST

I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR (U2, 1987)
Disturbed turn U2's earnest, gospel-inflected ballad into a chugging, rock-radio song. The riffs from the second verse onwards sound weirdly out of place, as does the mid-song solo. Plus, there's only one monkey noise in it.

FADE TO BLACK (Metallica, 1984)
A live version on the *Music As A Weapon II* compilation showed Disturbed could do pretty good Metallica karaoke, David even doing a throaty, Hetfield rasp. They added nothing new to The Four Horsemen's song, though.

LIVING AFTER MIDNIGHT (Judas Priest, 1980)
This song featured on a covermount CD that came with this very magazine. Again, it remains largely faithful to the original version, Disturbed paying tribute to some of the legends that inspired them.

MIDLIFE CRISIS (Faith No More, 1992)
The best bit about this cover is the round that starts up towards the end. School assemblies would have been a lot more interesting if they'd let us sing this instead of the usual twee classics.

SHOUT 2000 (Tears For Fears, 1984)
From new romantic to nu metal. The vocal delivery of the original lent itself to David's staccato technique, and the industrial guitar lines added a welcome 90s twist. The risk paid off, and showed they weren't afraid to have some fun.

LAND OF CONFUSION (Genesis, 1986)
The defining feature of this is surely David's startling, punctuating barks, completely at odds with Phil Collins' original style. By adding moshpit-bounce to the riffs, Disturbed elevated the song from dad-rock hit to metal banger.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE (Simon & Garfunkel, 1964)
Toning down their theatrics in favour of a more subtle approach, Disturbed added a piano part and swelling orchestration, and let David's deep vocals take centre stage. A successful Trojan horse into the mainstream.

At the risk of slicing open a hornet's nest, we bring up David's last *Metal Hammer* feature in 2015. We said there was an air of humility to his words, but suggested it may well be fake humility, affected for the sake of appearance. When the magazine came out, his publicist called to tell us he was upset.

"I felt hurt, to be honest," he sighs. "I think people want to believe that I'm this egomaniacal prick, and I really do my damndest not to be. Anybody who truly knows me and is around me on a regular basis would tell you unabashedly that it's completely unjustified. Especially when you go out of your way to try and extend an olive branch, and you literally get slapped in the face as a result. It's betrayal, of sorts."

Before we can mention a particularly outrageous *Metal Hammer* from 2002, David jumps in first.

"My favourite, and I had to explain to my *mother* back in the day, was when I was on your cover and they superimposed a priest's uniform on me. I never wore that – that was Photoshopped."

What? We were going to ask how you felt about posing in a dog collar when you're Jewish…

"Someone sent a copy of the magazine to my parents. My mother calls on the phone crying, like, [puts on his mum's distressed voice] 'What are you doing? Did we raise you to do this?' I have all the respect in the world for Christianity and Catholicism, but when your Jewish parents see you dressed up as a priest, they think, 'Oh my god, we've failed!'"

We actually called it 'The Freaks! Issue', and it had Mortiis and Mushroomhead on it. You were on the cover with that image and –

"– I'm a 'freak'. Of course, it's OK."

He says those last words like a benevolent clergyman absolving someone of their sins, or a father soothing a child who's worried they've done something wrong.

"There's certain people the media embraces with open arms, because someone at that particular publication fell in love with that band. And it's totally their style and totally their taste, and maybe we weren't. To me, there was a clear reason why. I became a popular face on the dartboard to throw darts at, and it worked for the publications who were building on this perception that I was one of these guys they loved to hate. 'Mad Davey', and all that bullshit."

Do you feel a sense of vindication, that you ended up selling all these records?

"I try not to even bring that into focus, to be honest. I judge how we're doing, how I'm doing, by the fans, not the media. And look… I look forward to a day

Nineties survivors! David Draiman with Limp Bizkit's John Otto and System Of A Down's Serj Tankian in 2002

"MY MOTHER CALLED ME, CRYING, BECAUSE OF *METAL HAMMER*"

PERHAPS PUTTING A JEWISH SINGER IN A PRIEST'S DOG COLLAR WAS A LITTLE FAR...

when we win them over, too. I'm not going to meet negativity with negativity. I've been at a very different place in my head for years now, people just haven't been willing to recognise it. I don't really give it much thought." He pauses to issue a soft hello to a pigeon flapping overhead.

None of this has stopped David establishing a strong status among metal's elite. While Disturbed were on hiatus, he produced Trivium's 2013 album *Vengeance Falls*, and put together the band he refers to as "the Device experiment" – something he perceives as a failure because they could only fill small venues ("some experiments need to be disassembled and put away"). Yet their self-titled record featured the likes of M. Shadows, Lita Ford, Lzzy Hale, Serj Tankian, Tom Morello, and Black Sabbath legends Glenn Hughes and Geezer Butler.

"It was such a wonderful and welcome reality check, and they're not always wonderful and welcome," he admits. "I tracked Glenn Hughes! Nuts. I have Geezer Butler's bassline on my track. Even saying it doesn't feel real to me. I was just texting back and forth with Dave Mustaine the other day. You want to talk about vindication? That is the ultimate vindication to me, to have the people you look up to respect you enough to jump in on something like that."

Since ditching Twitter, David's private life has faded from view, but there have been some trials behind the triumphs. He moved from Austin, Texas, to Honolulu, Hawaii, near wife Lena's family. Their four-year-old son, Sam, had been suffering from severe allergies, resulting in 15 febrile seizures – convulsions in children, brought on by fever – since he was born. And while David has a background in medical administration, nothing could

Disturbed (left to right): John Moyer, Mike Wengren, David Draiman, Dan Donegan

GETTY

Disturbed rocking up to a post-Grammy party in 2002. The band have been nominated for two Grammys to date

DAVID VS DAVID

THE SINGER REVISITS SOME FAMOUS QUOTES FROM *HAMMER*'S PAST

THEN: (October 2002, on *The Sickness* selling more than 3.5million copies) "It was all the more satisfying because it was such a quiet, honest victory. We are undoubtedly the biggest cult metal band in the world!"

NOW: "Not only do I not see us as a cult, I don't see us as the biggest. I think what I had said was not cult, but underground. To have sold 3million records on your debut, but still be relatively unknown and unrecognisable, and for people to kind of know the songs but not know the band – that's where things were at that point. I certainly wouldn't say it the same way these days. We're just Disturbed. I don't know that we're the biggest, but we're thankful to have had so many people come onboard and stay onboard."

THEN: (October 2002, on *Believe* containing themes of religious genocide) "We're not a pop band, we're Disturbed, and we write serious music for serious minds. We're looking to fit into the grand traditions of Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Metallica and Tool."
NOW: "I still agree with trying to maintain that standard. But not everything has been serious. *The Animal* [2010], for example, is a fantastic piece about being a werewolf. I can start to understand why certain people thought I took myself a little too seriously…"

THEN: (September 2010, on why he writes songs) "Songwriting has always been a means of venting, of catharsis. You get the evil out of you. When you allow it to fester inside, that's when it takes you over. You need to grab it by the throat and master it."
NOW: "Absolutely. I still believe that 100%. This record is evidence of that. We've had a lot of death to deal with. Myself personally, and the music community. It really does go through the entire playing field for me of things that require catharsis. It's still the soundest means of therapy. It truly is."

have prepared him for seeing his own child suffer.

"You can only have the brain reset so many times," he sighs. "One of the most traumatic times was when I was in the shower, and I hear my wife scream. She kicks open the doors to the bathroom holding my son's limp, lifeless body, and she's like, 'What do I do?' I put him on his left side, made sure his airway was clear, made sure he wasn't injuring himself, and called the paramedics. They ended up knowing us because they came by so often. I just couldn't handle watching my kid go through that anymore. Thank god, his quality of life has improved 100%."

While filled with relief, he's been thrown into a destabilising period of adjustment, leaving his home of eight years to start over at age 45. "I know, poor me, I moved from Austin to Honolulu," he jokes. "But it's been a massive change and getting used to it is still a work in progress. It's been tough because I don't know anybody there, and I haven't really had the time to get to know anybody, because the band have been so busy."

This sense of loss and uncertainty has been compounded by bereavement. Like many other musicians we've spoken to over the last 18 months, the deaths of Chester Bennington, Chris Cornell and now Vinnie Paul have hit him hard. On top of that, his grandmother passed away from cancer.

"That broke my heart pretty bad because, poor thing, she didn't have an easy life at all," he begins. "She was a survivor of Auschwitz. She was around 14, and she survived after being in line to the gas chamber on three separate occasions; they let her crawl under people's legs to the back of the line. The last time, she was *in* the chamber. She found a door, it was open, and she walked out. Shortly after, the camp was liberated. And so between that, and struggling in Europe afterwards, and eventually moving to the United States, and raising a family with difficult economic conditions, and dealing with the language barrier… and then at the end of her days, she suffered tremendously, and it was so horrific to watch."

He started dwelling on mortality and, though he knows he shouldn't have, unloaded his frustrations onto his devout parents. He has gone through periods of depression, supported by his wife.

"It's things like that that make you question everything. Like, what the hell did she do to deserve so much pain? People wonder why I strayed from the path of religion. Can anybody make sense of this for me? How does a merciful god allow a woman who's never done anything to anyone, to die like this? It's one of the great questions whenever you talk about issues of faith."

"THIS RECORD WILL BREAK DOWN DOORS"

DISTURBED BELIEVE *EVOLUTION* WILL BE THEIR *BLACK ALBUM*

Against this turbulent backdrop, Disturbed made seventh album *Evolution* at The Hideout Recording Studio in Las Vegas, with returning producer Kevin Churko (In This Moment, Five Finger Death Punch). It features the sort of galvanising, rhythmic songs you'd expect, such as call-to-arms anthem *Are You Ready* and rallying cry *No More*. But of the 10 tracks, half are ballads: *A Reason To Fight*, about David's experiences seeing a loved one battling addiction; *In Another Time,* a wistful analysis of social media; *Hold On To Memories*, which ruminates on how to honour the departed; *Watch You Burn*, an up-tempo critique of the entertainment industry; and *Already Gone*, an unflinching "statement of despair" about death.

"*The Sound Of Silence* taught us that we shouldn't be afraid of pushing the boundaries. We've been hungering for years, years, years to do material like what we've done on the new record," explains David. "Some people just like the heavy stuff and they don't want to take a breather. For me – and I've used this analogy before – the slap feels much more satisfying after the caress."

As well as taking cues from Simon & Garfunkel, Disturbed immersed themselves in the likes of the Eagles, Kansas, Styx, Fleetwood Mac and – he puts on a 'guilty pleasures' face – Illinois rockers REO Speedwagon and Australian soft rock duo Air Supply. They started off writing only ballads, before adding the "meat and potatoes for the hardcore fans". David is so confident about the new material that he makes a bold claim.

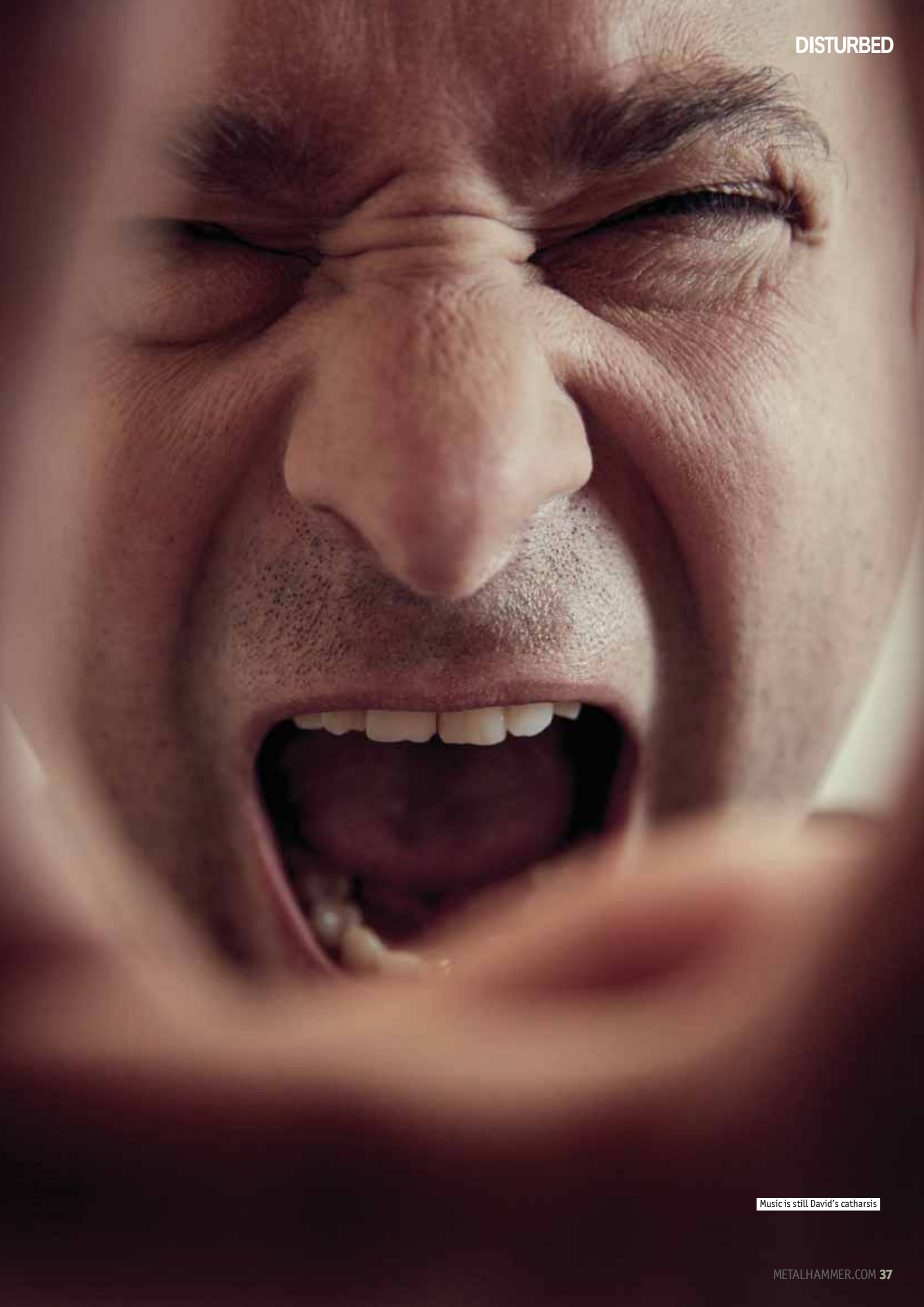
"If *I* died after this record came out, and this was the end of our legacy, I'd be OK with that," he states. "To me, this is our *Black Album*. We've always used that as a goal. The record that literally every single track on it could be a hit. A record that breaks doors down, that opens up new opportunities to us, that helps you achieve true immortality as an artist."

Fixing us with another stare, half knowing, half sheepish, he explains that he took out his signature chin "pieces" after their last show, five days ago in Wisconsin. He won't be putting them back in. Ever.

"I feel like it's forced," he explains. "It's weird being a 45-year-old Hot Topic guy. They're a pain in the ass to sing with, and I've been injured on more than one occasion. I don't know how many times I've swallowed the damn backings in my sleep. Don't get me wrong, for the longest time I loved the individuality it expressed. But now, whether I'm wearing them or not, people know who I am."

Evolution, it would seem, is the word. After all these years of pushing his band onwards in the face of adversity, David Draiman has assumed his most powerful form yet. ✠

***EVOLUTION* IS OUT SOON VIA WARNERS. SEE METALHAMMER.COM FOR DETAILS**



Music is still David's catharsis

MUSIC TRUMP(ET)S WAR

Once upon a time, there was a man with a trumpet. And when he was a soldier in the US Army landing on the beaches of Normandy, he kept it by his side. Once, when he was standing guard at night, his captain told him: "Don't play tonight, there's a sharpshooter out there." But our man thought: "That guy out there is just as scared and lonely as me. I'll play a piece for him." The next day, a POW was brought into the camp, and he asked: "Who is the trumpeter that played 'Lili Marleen' last night? When I heard that song, the war was over for me - I just couldn't use my gun any more." The man with the trumpet was called Jack Leroy Tueller. And though it may sound like a fairy tale, this is a true story. A story only music can write.

th•mann
MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

"METAL NEEDED THEM"

We asked the Metal God, **Rob Halford**, to head up our special, multi-part tribute to Pantera. He talks about his memories of the Texan metal machine, their impact on our world and how the recent loss of Vinnie Paul brings their story to a sad but definitive end

WORDS: ROB HALFORD

It can't be stressed enough how important Pantera were in saving heavy metal in the 1990s. Things were getting a little mellow, especially in America. Then along came these four gentlemen from Texas who had captured the true spirit of heavy metal. It came from their hearts and their souls. Metal in the 90s needed Pantera. They were the springboard for so many other bands afterwards.

I didn't know anything about them until around 1990, when Judas Priest were rehearsing for the Painkiller tour up in Toronto. They had this TV channel, MuchMusic, which was like the MTV of Canada, and I was watching it in my hotel room. And I saw this chap, Dime, talking about his band, Pantera, and about heavy metal in general. But he was wearing a *British Steel* T-shirt, so that really caught my eye. And then they played the video for the song *Cowboys From Hell*, and I was instantly glued to the screen: 'What is this? This is amazing!'

So I called the MuchMusic studios and said, 'Is this guy Dime still there? Because I'd like to pop over and meet him.' So I jumped in a taxi and went right round to the studio. That was the first time I ever met him in person, and right from the get-go we clicked. He was a massive Priest fan, a massive fan of heavy metal music in general. It was an instant friendship.

That night, they were playing a little club in Toronto, so we went straight from the studio to the venue. That's where I met Phil and Rex and, of course, Vinnie. That Texas hospitality people talk about is a very real thing, and I felt it that night. We were talking and it felt like we'd been friends forever.

We jammed together that night – I went on and did *Metal Gods* and *Grinder*. Those bonds were forged on the spot – bonds of friendship, bonds of music.

I told the rest of Priest about them, and that was it – we ended up taking Pantera with us to Europe on the Painkiller tour, which is where the band were introduced to the metalheads over there for the first time.

The identity that everyone knew them for was in place right from the start. They were a real gang, you couldn't help but notice that. They were always together in their dressing room. They'd sometimes come into the Priest dressing room, and we would sit and talk metal while they had a few drinks. Or more than a few drinks…

"THEY UNDOUBTEDLY INFLUENCED ME"

JUDAS PRIEST WERE INSPIRED BY SEEING PANTERA SMASHING IT ONSTAGE

The band were so hungry for it. They'd play anywhere, go on at any time and give 1,000%. They would do whatever it took to get themselves established and become a solid force in heavy metal. They were very, very hungry – couldn't wait to get onstage. And they had all the power and resource and energy that any new young band has. Just watching them play night after night, giving it all as if that was going to be the last show they'd ever play, was very potent.

They were certainly party animals – that side of the Pantera myth has definitely not been blown out of proportion. They were living the life, as any new young metal band that's becoming successful has a right to do. It's a rite of passage. You're on tour with a band you think the world of – in their case, Judas Priest – you're going to countries that you never dreamed you'd ever see, of course you're going to live the life and eat up everything in your path, just enjoy things to the max.

But at the same time as they were having a good time, they never let it interfere with the music. They took it very, very seriously. They wouldn't have achieved what they did if they hadn't taken it seriously.

I never gave them any advice. I don't think they needed any, frankly. They were so confident and had such a great self-belief. However, they were very humble – they weren't showing off or bragging, going, 'We're going to be the next big thing.' There was none of that in Pantera. None of the members of the band displayed any arrogance or that element that sometimes exists in rock'n'roll. They were true gentlemen in that respect.

I was lucky enough to record with them in the early 90s. We did a song together, *Light Comes Out Of The Black*, for the soundtrack to the original *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* movie. At the time I was in Phoenix and the job had to be done really quickly. I called Dimebag and he said, 'Just come on down.' I said, 'When?' and he said, 'Whenever you want.' So I got on the plane the next day to Dallas, got a cab to the studio and ran through the rough demos that I'd put together. Everyone was like, 'Got it.' And bang, we wrapped the whole thing up in a couple of hours.

They undoubtedly influenced me. All of us in Priest would go up onstage and watch them play. You have to be aware of what's going on around you, because you can gain so much

AS TOLD TO DAVE EVERLEY

Rob Halford, pictured here with Sebastian Bach and Phil Anselmo, loved Pantera from the very first time he heard them

JOE GIRON/ATLASICONS

Vinnie, Dime, Rex and Phil: game-changers

FRANK FORCINO / FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

insight and inspiration from new, exciting, game-changing bands. And Pantera definitely changed the game.

I don't think there was anyone else around at the time who had that kind of fierce power and push and aggression and connection. They had the riffs, the groove, the charisma, the power – all of those things. Of course, in Dimebag Darrell they had someone who was just mindblowing – the guy who changed the way people played guitar in metal. But for me, it was equally about the rhythm section – you haven't got a band unless you have a great drummer and a great bass player, and Vinnie Paul and Rex Brown were up there with the best.

And it was also the way that they put their songs together that made them special. And the way they developed from *Cowboys From Hell* to *Vulgar Display Of Power* to *Far Beyond Driven* to *The Great Southern Trendkill* was remarkable. They got more intense and more powerful and stronger. They took themselves to the next level and dragged metal with them.

Of course, they crashed and burned in the end. It was sad, but I don't think it was unusual, especially when you have four very strong individual characters like they had. Like millions, I wish there had have been an opportunity where they could have mended the fractures and healed the divisions, because at the end of the day it's the music that matters more than anything else, regardless of your inner demons. You've got to try and find a way to overcome that and listen to the sound you make together.

In my heart, I think if Dimebag hadn't been taken from us, the band would have got back together at some point. Time does that to you. Look at Guns N' Roses, look at Bruce and Maiden, look at Priest. At some point, we all looked at each other and said, 'You know what guys, let's do it, because what we have together is fucking amazing.' Now Vinnie is gone too, I feel sad that we're never going to have the opportunity to witness that now.

I saw Vinnie many times over the years. He would burst into the dressing room whenever we were in town, and he was always welcome. Success didn't change him one bit. I last saw him on Priest's most recent run through the States – he'd be on the side of the stage, banging away to the music. That's how Vinnie was – he wanted to be there in the mix. He loved the vibe of heavy metal.

Dime and Vinnie grabbed life by the balls

"IF DIMEBAG HADN'T BEEN TAKEN, THEY WOULD HAVE GOT BACK TOGETHER"

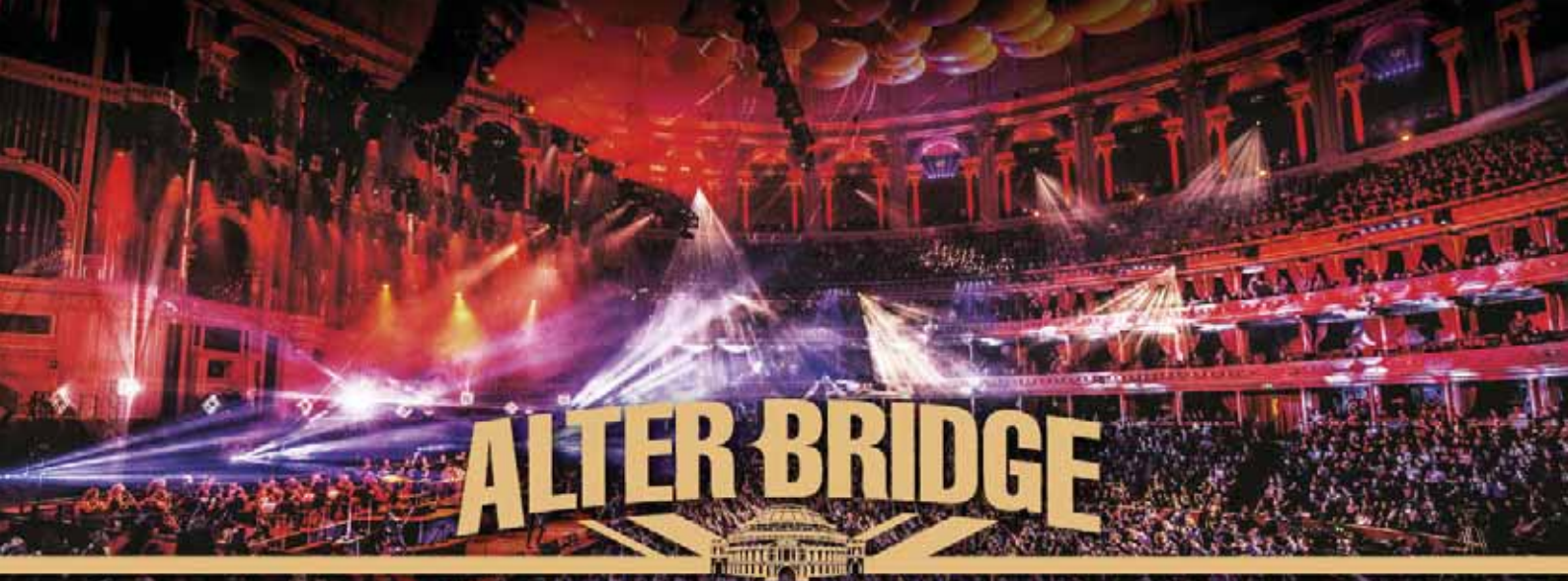
ROB RECKONS TIME WOULD HAVE HEALED THE BAND'S OLD WOUNDS

He was still the same guy I remember meeting in that little club in Toronto years before, when hardly anybody knew who Pantera were. That's another measure of success – if you can keep a level head, and not bring your onstage persona offstage. That was Vinnie. That Texas hospitality wasn't made up. It was part of his soul. He was a very loving, caring, generous guy. Where did you ever read anything negative about Vinnie Paul?

There are so many great Pantera songs. But if there's one that defines it for me, it's *Cowboys From Hell* – that first song I heard all those years ago. But I love *Walk*, too – you listen to the interplay between what Dimebag and what Vinnie and Rex are doing, and you can hear the essence of Pantera right there.

There never will be another Pantera. They're a unique, iconic band, and they've inspired so many unique, iconic bands in their wake. That's the stamp they've left. There'll always be bands offering a similar kind of experience – heavy metal thrives on that – but as far as another Pantera, no, never. I don't think there needs to be. There was only ever one Pantera, and that's the way it should be left. ✠

STUART TAYLOR / FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY



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"WE'LL NEVER SEE THEIR LIKE AGAIN"

How did a glam band from Texas end up redefining metal itself? King Diamond, Scott Ian, Andreas Kisser and original Pantera frontman Terry Glaze saw it all happen firsthand

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

The first time Scott Ian heard Pantera's *Cowboys From Hell* back in 1991, he didn't know what it was. Standing in the crowd at a Living Colour gig at LA's Universal Amphitheatre, waiting for the headliners to come on, the Anthrax guitarist heard the song's now-familiar juddering intro coming over the PA.

"It immediately caught my ear because it sounded like it was on a loop or the CD was skipping," he recalls. "Then that riff kicks in with the drums and I'm listening to this thing going, 'What the *fuck* is this? This is really heavy!' It was amazing. I had no idea who it was. In the next couple of days, I heard it on KNAC Radio in Los Angeles and they announced it as Pantera from Texas with *Cowboys From Hell*. I was like, 'Oh my god!'"

Scott Ian and Pantera had been friends for several years when the Texan band released their breakthrough album. They all met for the first time back in 1986 when Anthrax were on their first US headlining tour and played a show in Dallas. Dimebag Darrell's girlfriend Rita Haney approached Scott and invited him and his bandmates to come down to a show Pantera were playing, at a much smaller venue down the street, after their own gig was over. By the end of the night, Anthrax and the fledgling Pantera were jamming the former's *Metal Thrashing Mad* together onstage and an unbreakable friendship was forged. But even bearing his fondness for Pantera, Scott was hugely surprised to witness the band's transformation into groove metal revolutionaries.

"Musically, they were always great because their musicianship was insane," he notes. "The first time we saw Dime, it was obvious he was something special. It was just that the songwriting didn't match the attitude on their early records. They didn't *sound* like this band from Texas that we knew could run circles around everyone else. Obviously Darrell played great, but the records weren't very good, in my humble opinion, ha ha!"

Famously, of course, the first three Pantera albums are virtually unrecognisable as the work of the band that would go on to make *Cowboys From Hell* and *Vulgar Display Of Power*. Inspired by their love of Van Halen, Kiss and, to a lesser degree, Southern rock and the burgeoning thrash scene, *Metal Magic, Projects In The Jungle* and *I Am The Night* exhibited little of the originality or intensity that would make the band global superstars, but they did showcase a very young band – Dimebag Darrell was barely 14 when they played their first bar gig – that was furiously putting in the hours required to become convincing contenders.

"We played four, five, six times a week in Texas, when we were in high school," says Terry Glaze, Pantera vocalist on those first three albums. "We were able to learn our craft. In Los Angeles, you might get to play a 15-minute set so it's all about presentation. But growing up in Texas, it's all about playing four or five or six sets. You might play 70 songs a night. So you really learned how to play your instrument."

"Oh yeah, they were animals back then," agrees Scott. "Especially down in that area of Texas and Oklahoma, they had a circuit going on down there and those guys were playing *constantly* in clubs. Those guys were nonstop for years before Cowboys came out, so it's not like it was some overnight success. But I think everyone would agree that when Philip joined, *that's* when they truly found themselves and became the band they wanted to be."

"WE WERE PLAYING 70 SONGS A NIGHT"

ORIGINAL PANTERA SINGER TERRY GLAZE SAW HIS BAND PUT IN THE HARD HOURS

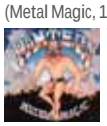
A rough-hewn but charismatic replacement for Terry, Phil Anselmo joined Pantera in 1986. The new line-up's first effort, *Power Metal*, emerged in 1988 and certainly hinted at greatness to come without truly stepping away from the band's glam-tinged roots. Something magical happened over the next two years, however. Released in the summer of 1990, *Cowboys From Hell* was much more than just the next step in a promising new band's evolution. Pantera had mutated into an unstoppable, ultra-brutal eight-legged machine, marrying the precision and savagery of thrash to an instinctive sense of swing and ➤

THE 50 GREATEST PANTERA SONGS EVER

We trawled through the Texan megaweights' entire back catalogue to pick the 50 songs you need in your life

Widowmaker

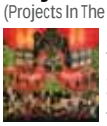
(Metal Magic, 1983)



The heaviest moment on Pantera's distinctly naïve and somewhat unremarkable debut album, *Widowmaker* showed that Dimebag could play like an absolute motherfucker. The seed for the band's true sound was sown here.

Projects In The Jungle

(Projects In The Jungle, 1984)



Still clearly in thrall to Van Halen and Kiss, Pantera were beginning to embrace thrash's rough edges on their second album. The title track is a clattering showcase for Vinnie and Dime's sparkling chemistry and Terry Glaze's strident vocals.

Valhalla

(I Am The Night, 1985)

By album three, Dime was really beginning to hit his stride. Echoing metal's journey into grittier territory, *Valhalla* was more speed metal than glam, a Priest-like heads-down sprint that has dated far better than most pre-*Cowboys*... tunes.

Down Below

(Power Metal, 1988)

Exit Terry Glaze. Enter Phil Anselmo, the final piece of the Pantera puzzle. Suddenly, the Texans sounded like contenders, even if Phil's high-pitched vocals on this rejigged *I Am The Night* cut gave little indication of the brutal oratory to come.

Death Trap

(Power Metal, 1988)

More balls-out traditional heavy metal, albeit with just enough of that Dime and Vinnie magic to make the band's next (and, it transpired, definitive) step a real possibility. With shades of Megadeth and Anthrax leaking through, this was a pre-*Cowboys*... warm-up.

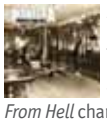
WORDS: DOM LAWSON

Pantera honed their craft in Texan clubs while they were still just kids

FRANK WHITE

Cowboys From Hell

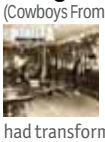
(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)



A giant brick hurled through the metal mainstream's window, *Cowboys From Hell* changed the game. The brute force of thrash was colliding with the swagger and swing of Southern rock and a shit-ton of punk attitude. The result? Genius.

Primal Concrete Sledge

(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)



Dime's riffs, Rex's grinding bass, Phil's roar, Vinnie's unstoppable groove... Pantera had transformed into a terrifying machine by 1990, and *Primal Concrete Sledge* was the ultimate, fearless and brutally direct statement of their supremacy.

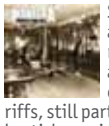
Psycho Holiday

(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)

As Pantera got heavier, their lyrics became much darker. *'Now I'm far from home/Spending time alone/ It's time to set my demons free...'* growls Phil Anselmo, as his comrades churn menacingly around him. *Psycho Holiday* is an unhinged classic.

Heresy

(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)



Staccato harmonics and a sinister rumble lead into another flurry of classic Dimebag riffs, still partly fuelled by the brutish precision of thrash but increasingly veering into more inventive realms. Meanwhile, Phil Anselmo invites detractors to *'lick my sack'*.

Cemetery Gates

(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)

One of the greatest epic ballads in metal history, *Cemetery Gates* proved that Pantera had the depth and dexterity to transcend lazy labelling. A masterpiece of crushing melodrama, it boasts one of the finest solos that Dime ever played.

Dime was "something special" remembers Scott Ian

groove that is often attributed to the Abbott brothers' love of ZZ Top. Whatever this new sound was, it gleefully ripped people's heads off and, nearly three decades later, the sound coined on *Cowboys...* is now a major part of metal's vocabulary. Back then, it changed the game and heralded the arrival of some true, new heavyweights.

"After *Cowboys...* you could just sense it, hanging out with those dudes, that something had changed," says Scott. "It's not like they were being boastful or stuck-up, but there was a confidence there that certainly hadn't existed before that record. Before, they were always so grateful that anyone gave a shit to come and see their band play, but now there was definitely a swagger. It was just a case of 'Listen to the record these guys just made!'"

If *Cowboys From Hell* was the catalyst, 1992's *Vulgar Display Of Power* was the ultimate, jaw-shattering show-stealer. Buoyed by their upward ascent, Pantera further refined their sound, stripping it right down to its vicious, muscular essence. The crushing *Mouth For War*, the bug-eyed war cry of *A New Level*, the platinum-plated groove metal anthem *Walk*, the ferocious *Fucking Hostile*, the grimly melodramatic *This Love*, the thrash blitzkrieg of *Rise...* the first half of *Vulgar...* still makes most other metal records sound half-arsed, and the second half is very nearly as good. Back in 1992, as metal was beginning to enter its most troublesome era, Pantera were haughtily ignoring grunge and making balls-out metal that resonated with a huge global audience.

A long-time friend of Pantera, King Diamond moved to Dallas from his native Denmark in '92. On arriving, his first musical endeavour was a now-legendary show at Savvy's Bar in Fort Worth, Texas on New Year's Eve of that year, performing three songs (two Priest covers and his own *Omens*... and it's all on YouTube!) with Dime, Vinnie and Rex as his backing band. From then on, King attended every show his new friends played in Dallas. Having witnessed the *Vulgar...* era from close quarters, King has some insight to what made the band so special.

"Seeing them back then, every time they played, each person in the band was a powerhouse on his own," states the legendary Dane. "They couldn't fail if they played together. Those four guys complemented each other *perfectly*. You don't often find that. They had so much confidence but they were so relaxed about it. I could see how they had the audience by the balls, how brutal Phil was and how incredibly

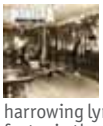
THE 50 GREATEST PANTERA SONGS EVER

Domination
(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)

As if to balance out *Cemetery Gates'* sophisticated excesses, this turbocharged neck-wrecker encapsulates the razor-sharp intuition between all four members of Pantera. The grooves are *absurdly* powerful.

Domination, you say? Easy.

Message In Blood
(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)



Taking Pantera into the darkest of territories, Phil Anselmo's venomous, harrowing lyrics were a major factor in the band's ability to unite metalheads of all stripes. This twisted tale of bloody revenge placed his verbal madness centre stage.

The Sleep
(Cowboys From Hell, 1990)

One of those Pantera songs that diehards adore but that somehow escapes the mainstream radar, *The Sleep* is a gloriously creepy and dissonant slow-burner until Dime rips into one of the most spinetingling and audacious guitar solos you will ever hear.

Mouth For War
(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

If *Cowboys...* woke the world up to Pantera's power, *Vulgar Display Of Power* blew the fucking roof off. From Phil's opening declaration of *'Revenge! I'm screaming revenge again!'* onwards, its opening track was groove metal given the ultimate upgrade.

A New Level
(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

If one song summed up Pantera's supreme confidence at this point, *A New Level* is it. A series of visceral, fidgeting riffs gives way to that immortal chorus: *'A new level of confidence and power...'* It pretty much summed up the whole *Vulgar Display...* album.

STUART TAYLOR / FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

The Pantera guys hard at work recording *Vulgar*... in Texas in 1991

skilled everyone else was. Even when it looked like they were out of control, they had this *focus*."

"The band were a reflection of their personalities," says Terry Date, Pantera's producer from *Cowboys*... until *The Great Southern Trendkill* in 1996. "It was extreme ability and musicianship combined with the fact that they were so intensely loyal to their fans. They gave *everything* to their fans. That, and being innovators and taking that style of music to a different level and in a different direction by adding that groove."

The usual path for a newly successful rock band to take is to veer into more commercial territory. Pantera were never going to do that. Instead, 1994's *Far Beyond Driven* was an insanely aggressive and uncompromising record, almost entirely bereft of positive vibes and full of extreme metal chaos and the darkest, nastiest of lyrics. But such was Pantera's popularity at the time, this most remorselessly intense of 90s metal albums shot straight to Number One in the US charts in March 1994. In an era when metal was supposed to be struggling, the Texans were proudly scaring the shit out of the mainstream.

"Metallica were still selling out arenas, but by the mid-90s it was hard time for us, Megadeth and Slayer," Scott Ian remembers. "Grunge was the only thing that mattered and we were all being labelled 'old bands from the 80s'! Ha! But Pantera carried the torch for metal all through the 90s. They were riding high on the back of *Vulgar*... and then *Far Beyond Driven* came out. There wasn't any bullshit about the charts back then, like there is nowadays. They entered the charts at Number One having *physically* sold more than anyone else in the country. To do it with a record as extreme as that was completely unheard of."

Although Pantera would never again scale the commercial heights of *Far Beyond Driven*, their status as *the* metal band of the 90s was beyond dispute when the decade drew to a close. Pantera's final album, *Reinventing The Steel*, was released in 2000 and now seems like a slightly subdued finale from a band that knew they had been the best in the business – not to mention metal's official saviours – for a long time. But despite the band's regrettable split and the tragedies that have followed, Pantera's reputation, their legendary status and the unassailable bond that existed between them and their fans have all strengthened and grown over the years. Like Sabbath, Priest, Maiden and Metallica before them, Pantera made music that transcended scenes and genres by simply being the real goddamn deal.

"As a band, they embraced *everything*," says Sepultura's Andreas Kisser. "They could do a song like Van Halen or Metallica or they could do a song like Slipknot or Sepultura. They could do everything and the only thing linking it all together was *them*. They had that special chemistry and a very unique guitar player that you'll never see the like of again. I feel lucky to have known them and to have played a little part in their lives. We're gonna keep listening to Pantera loud for the rest of our lives."

"You're lucky if you're remembered this time next year, but people will be playing Pantera's music forever," states Terry Glaze. "The combination of what they did and the art that they made, it's just undeniable. I'm just so lucky that I got to be there for a brief moment."

"The magic of Pantera is that it all came straight from the heart," King Diamond concludes. "They didn't overthink what they did, it came from deep inside and it hit the right nerve. People could just relate to it, the brutality of the whole thing but also the skill level in the musicianship. They were brutal, honest and very, very skilful. To create a band like Pantera, they were the *only* ones who could do it. They had *everything*." ✠

"SOMETHING CHANGED IN THEM. THERE WAS A SWAGGER NOW"

SCOTT IAN WITNESSED PANTERA GRADUATE WITH *COWBOYS FROM HELL*

NEW LEVELS

The numbers that make up one of metal's greatest legacies

9

Studio albums. Although we all only really count five of them, right?

60,000,000

Number of records sold as of last year. Safe to say it's probably still growing today

1,038

Total gigs played across their career – 749 of which were in the States

Four Grammy nominations, all for Best Metal Performance

14

Age of Dimebag when Pantera formed in 1981

Ozzfest

3

Stints on 90s metal Mecca Ozzfest: '97 and 2000 in the US and '98 in the UK

160,000

Population of Pantera's hometown, Arlington, Texas, when they first formed

396,394

Population of Arlington as of last year

94

Number of times they covered the Black Sabbath classic, *Planet Caravan*

18

Number of other artists Pantera covered live – including Cinderella, Ted Nugent, Kiss and, um... Fleetwood Mac

Walk

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

Pantera wrote plenty of better songs than *Walk*, but they never hit the bull's-eye with quite the same unifying power as they did with this ageless anthem. If you love metal, wherever you are in the world, that opening riff will get the blood pumping. What do you say?

Fucking Hostile

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

The seething, snot-spattered flipside to *Walk*'s imperious stomp, *Fucking Hostile* was so much more extreme than anything else mainstream metal had to offer in 1992 that it took your breath away. Today, it still makes us want to run through a brick wall.

This Love

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

Sensitivity isn't the first trait we generally associate with Pantera, but the band's mastery of dynamics and, yes, ballads was second to none. This epic heart-wrencher starts in pretty, elegant mode before erupting into a mad-eyed bar brawl of a chorus.

Rise

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

Delivered at an insane pace, *Rise* served to reaffirm what a truly devastating team Dime, Rex and Vinnie could be. As Philip Anselmo bellows one of his most thrilling, incendiary diatribes, Pantera just get their heads down and fuckin' *slay*.

No Good (Attack The Radical)

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

As radical as their sound seemed in 1992, there was still a strong edge of accessibility in Pantera's revitalised sound. *No Good* brought Dime's ingenious riffs together with a chorus hook so big you could catch Moby Dick with it.

"THEY WERE FUCKING MONSTERS"

The only thing that matched Pantera's live prowess was their ability to party. Don't believe us? Ask the bands who had to share the road with them

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

The fact is, no band embodied metal in the 90s like Pantera. It was there in the records they made, of course – no one else came close to the titanic punch of *Vulgar Display Of Power* or *Far Beyond Driven*. But their albums were only part of the story. An equally significant foundation for the Pantera legend was the band's stellar live shows. For much of the 1990s, they were the greatest band to grace a stage – a four-man hurricane of energy, fuelled by alcohol and righteous fury.

Sepultura toured with Pantera in 1994, and guitarist Andreas Kisser would jam *Walk* with them every night. "When they got onstage, it was sensational," he remembers. "They were one of the best live bands I've ever seen, and the sound would shake you to your core. I'm going to keep those memories in a very safe place, with a lot of love."

By the time Phil Anselmo joined in 1986, the band already had five years sweating it out in the stinking backroom clubs and cowboy bars of Texas under their belts. Original singer Terry Glaze recalls a typical show.

STUART TAYLOR/FRANK WHITE

Dime never let his partying get in the way of his playing

"I remember one gig, we drove out to Abilene, Texas and played a gig behind chicken wire," says Terry. "It was like a scene from *The Blues Brothers*, with cowboys. We're these little kids wearing spandex, playing ZZ Top music. But we were good and we won 'em over."

Those early sink-or-swim gigs honed Pantera into a fearsome live proposition, but it was the addition of Anselmo that took them to another level. Exodus singer Steve 'Zetro' Souza remembers taking Pantera out as support band just as they released *Cowboys From Hell*.

"We thought they were a poser band, a glam band," says Zetro with a laugh.

"WE THOUGHT THEY WERE A POSER BAND"

BUT EXODUS WERE PROVED WRONG WHEN THEY TOOK PANTERA ON TOUR

"I called my manager and said, 'Have you seen these guys? They're gonna get tortured!' And he said, 'No, no – they've changed their music style, listen to the record.' Then we see them get bigger success than Exodus ever achieved."

Former Skid Row singer Sebastian Bach first saw Pantera in their original incarnation in Forth Worth club Savvy's in 1986. Five years later, he invited them to support Skid Row on the US tour in support of their Number One album, *Slave To The Grind*.

"I stood there at the side of the stage, watching Pantera at the height of their power and tightness and I was, like, 'I have to fucking go onstage after *that*?!' Oh my god, it really wasn't easy."

It wasn't just onstage where Pantera were building their reputation. Before and after the shows, their tour bus and dressing room would be ground zero for anyone wanting to party. Tequila, beer, the infamous Black Tooth Grin – two shots of Seagram's 7 whiskey, two shots of Crown Royal and a splash of Coke – would be lined up, begging to be drunk. It all helped build up the myth of Pantera as the ultimate good-time band.

"Oh man, there was no myth," says Sebastian Bach. "That's who those guys were. Onstage, offstage – it was a 24/7 party. But the partying never got in the way of the gig. Up there, they could have taken on anybody."

Throughout the 90s, Pantera notched up show after killer show, tour after landmark tour. They opened for Judas Priest and Skid Row, and played the landmark Monsters Of Rock festival in Moscow. In 1992, they supported Megadeth. "Oh, we fucking crushed them," recalled Phil of the latter. "We played with a chip on our shoulder every single night. All the years being bogged down in the fucking clubs most certainly fuelled me."

THE 50 GREATEST PANTERA SONGS EVER

By Demons Be Driven

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

Another gruesome exercise in grinding groove metal, *Vulgar Display…*'s darkest track is a swamp-dwelling blues metal death threat that left us in no doubt about Phil Anselmo's troubled spirit. *'Boiling my corpse in the blood of his children…' indeed.*

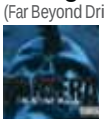
Hollow

(Vulgar Display Of Power, 1992)

Often mashed into a mid-set medley with *Domination, Hollow* brought *Vulgar Display…* to a close with more of the grandiose audacity that had made *Cemetery Gates* such a standout song. Here, melodic subtleties are many but brutality remains an unerring threat.

Strength Beyond Strength

(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)



Metal's hottest new band, Pantera became ever more extreme and uncompromising on *Far Beyond Driven*. The Number One album kicked off with this remorseless barrage of high-velocity thrash and lumbering sludge. *'Stronger than all'*? Yup.

Becoming

(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

'I'm born again with snake's eyes/ Becoming god-size…' has to rate as one of Pantera's greatest-ever choruses. It also helps that *Becoming* is propelled along on a truly perverse and discordant riff that sounds like R2-D2 being fed through a tree-shredder.

5 Minutes Alone

(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

Accused of causing a fan to be beaten up after calling him out for flipping the band off at a show, Phil Anselmo turns the tables with venomous glee on *5 Minutes Alone*, as Dime serves up a ludicrously muscular and insistent riff. As usual.

GETTY

Sebastian Bach and Dimebag in 1993. Possibly a little tipsy...

At a time when metal was in danger of flatlining, Pantera kept its pulse beating. In 1996, just before nu metal reinvigorated the scene, they teamed up with White Zombie for a co-headlining US tour. The shows were a huge success, but the darkness that had been brewing behind the scenes spilled over. Phil's physical exertions had gradually caused the discs in his spine to disintegrate and he turned to heroin to kill the pain. On July 13, after a triumphant homecoming gig in Dallas, he OD'd.

"When I turned to heroin, that was me closing the fucking door," he later said. "That was me saying, OK, I've had enough, fuck off and let me suffer. Just let me suffer. I'll get to these fucking gigs by hook or by crook and I most certainly chose the crook."

Post-overdose, Phil cleaned up his act, albeit temporarily, but it marked the start of Pantera's decline as a powerhouse live band. By the time of 2000's *Reinventing The Steel*, the writing was on the wall. When they returned to the UK that spring, they were a shadow of their former selves, a sluggish and incoherent Phil crippled by back pain and whatever he was medicating himself with to get over it. Within a year it was over, fizzling out with a whimper.

But that wasn't Pantera, not really. The real Pantera was the band who'd exploded from the dives a decade earlier to drag metal kicking and screaming into the 90s, bending audiences the world over to their will as they did it.

"Pantera were fucking monsters onstage," says Sebastian Bach. "There'll never be another live band like them." ✠

GETTY

Phil onstage on March 18, 1990, long before heroin crippled him

I'm Broken
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

Notably the Pantera song that Phil Anselmo performed live in Texas with Rex and Zakk Wylde in 2014, this single from *Far Beyond Driven* marries an off-kilter time signature with a devastating chorus that, let's face it, most of us can relate to on some level.

Hard Lines, Sunken Cheeks
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

A cautionary tale about painkiller abuse that would later seem somewhat ironic in light of Phil Anselmo's drug problems, this monstrous, seven-minute howl of pain remains one of Pantera's most emotionally gruelling songs.

Slaughtered
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

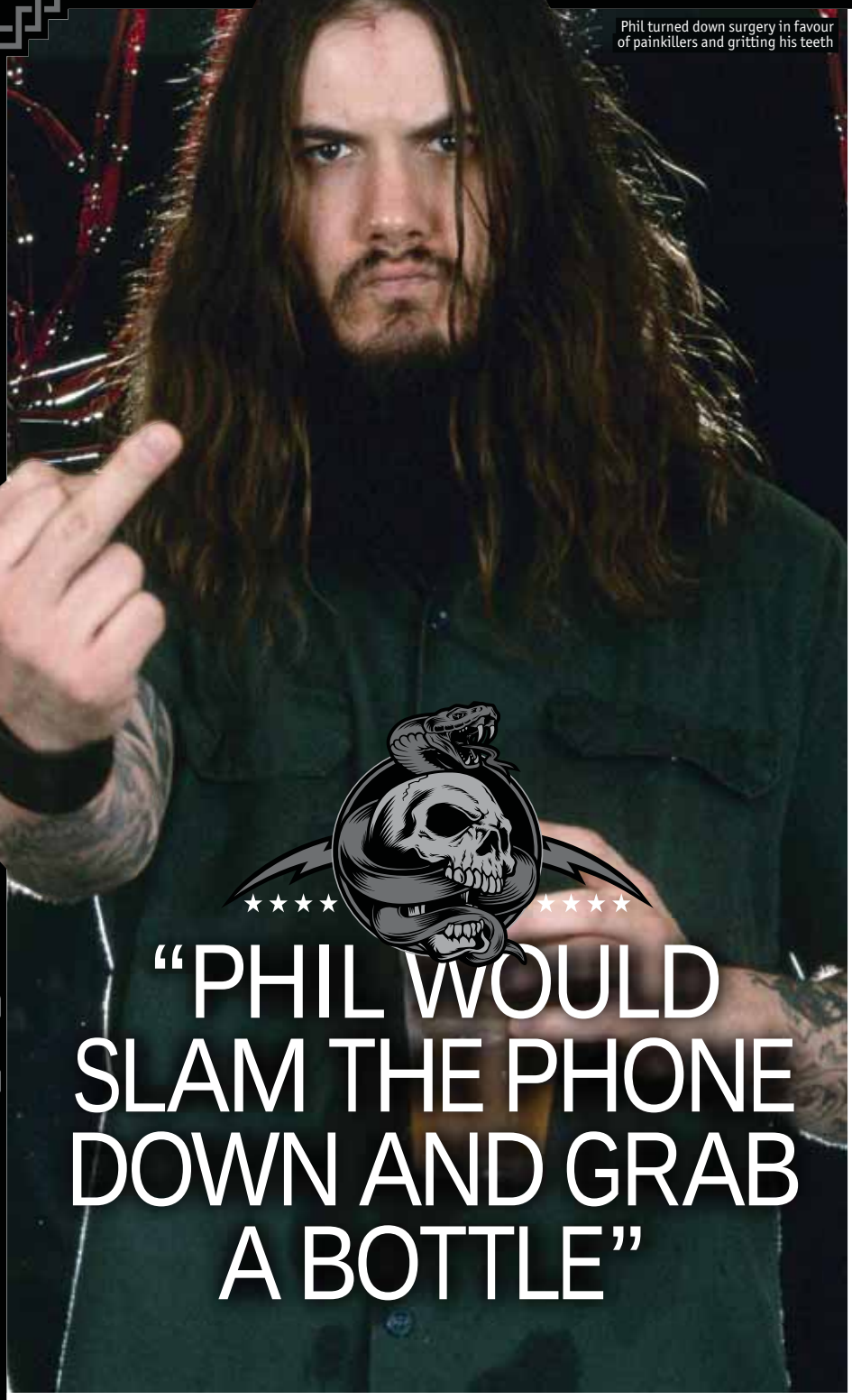
Sometimes, Pantera just went for the jugular. *Slaughtered* is brutish and bereft of light; a swivel-eyed, incensed dismantling of organised religion that drips with contempt and malicious intent. It's also a kickass metal song, incidentally.

25 Years
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

The savage honesty of Phil's lyrics has never been more apparent than on this gruelling cry of vengeance against his abusive father. *'I'm shoving my life right down your throat!'* he screams, as wickedly wrong-sounding riffs fester and snarl. Bloody hell.

Shedding Skin
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

Written about the young Phil's horror at the notion of settling for a mundane life, *Shedding Skin* pulls no punches. *'You were sticking to me like a scab!'* Philip screams over evil riffs. Not intended for radio and all the better for it, it's one of Pantera's heaviest.



Phil turned down surgery in favour of painkillers and gritting his teeth

"PHIL WOULD SLAM THE PHONE DOWN AND GRAB A BOTTLE"

While Pantera were making history in the mid-90s, behind the scenes, the cracks were starting to show. Dez Fafara and Terry Date witnessed a band at breaking point

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICS: MICK HUTSON

It was perhaps inevitable that a band who embraced excess and extremity in the way that Pantera did would implode in such acrimoniously bitter and crushingly sad circumstances. Riding high in the Billboard chart and carrying metal almost singlehandedly on their backs after the success of 1994's *Far Beyond Driven*, the strain began to take its toll both physically and mentally.

The catalyst could be traced to the back injury that Phil Anselmo suffered in the early 90s, leaving the frontman with three destroyed discs in his lower spine. "I crushed my back for the cause, for the music," Phil told *Hammer* in an interview in 2010. "I didn't know what else to do. I definitely have an addictive personality, but it's apparent that painkillers and drugs and whatnot are addictive."

As the Pantera juggernaut steamed ever onward, with Vinnie and Dime ringleaders of the biggest booze-fulled party in metal, Phil began to use anything he could to try and alleviate the pain. Quickly, a divide began to develop, with the Abbott brothers convinced that the band's success had changed Phil for the worse, while the singer himself became more erratic, ignoring doctors' orders to have an operation and instead gritting his teeth and fighting through the pain barrier as Pantera continued to tour. Wounded and heavily inebriated, Phil's mood and performance levels suffered dramatically, creating resentment from which no resolution was ever to be reached. "They were always different than me," he snarled in what became a notorious interview with *Hammer* in 2004. "They always had their circle of friends and I had my circle of friends."

By the time the band came off the road and entered the studio to make 1996's *The Great Southern Trendkill*, the fracture had changed Pantera's dynamic completely. Phil wasn't present in Dallas during the recording of the album's music, preferring instead to do his

THE 50 GREATEST PANTERA SONGS EVER

Throes Of Rejection
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

The final original song on the album that sent Pantera straight to the top of the US charts is defiantly uncommercial and pointedly ugly. *'If there is a god, then it's punishing me constantly'*, raged Phil Anselmo, all hell breaking loose around him.

Planet Caravan
(Far Beyond Driven, 1994)

A respectful but subtly distinctive cover of the psychedelic Black Sabbath classic, *Far Beyond Driven*'s oddly serene finale was a plain and simple tribute to the band that started it all. Full marks to Vinnie Paul for his exemplary bongo-playing, too.

The Badge
(The Crow OST, 1994)

A skull-shattering cover of a song originally by US punk legends Poison Idea, *The Badge* ended up on the soundtrack to director Alex Proyas's 1994 movie *The Crow*, injecting the whole goth-friendly enterprise with a much-needed dose of bilious rage.

The Great Southern Trendkill
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

Pantera marched on to their eighth studio album in an uncompromising mood. The opening title track, replete with backing vocals from Anal Cunt frontman Seth Putnam, was a fast and furious statement of total defiance.

War Nerve
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

'Fuck the world, for all it's worth / Every inch of Planet Earth…' On arguably their most ferocious album of all, Phil Anselmo was truly letting rip. Angular, twisted and horribly dark, *War Nerve* is without doubt one of Pantera's heaviest songs ever.

vocals in solitary at Trent Reznor's Nothing Studios in New Orleans.

"It was a long-distance relationship and pretty different from the other records," says producer Terry Date, who had worked with the band on every album since 1990's *Cowboys From Hell*. "The band would work on the music in the studio and send it out to Phil. I worked with Phil on the vocals in New Orleans. It was kind of a dark time in Phil's life and so the lyrics and the feel very much reflect that."

Even so, Terry denies any suggestion that Phil was difficult to work with during recording. "I was kind of aware," he states when asked about the frontman's addictive tendencies. "I saw a lot of it away from the studio, but, as far as when we were in the studio together, Phil was always on his game. He'd come in with his lyric sheets every day and he'd underline every lyric that he wanted to double track, and he would be there for two hours getting it done and then leave."

In 1996, *The Great Southern Trendkill*, their darkest and heaviest album yet, entered the Billboard charts at a hugely respectable Number Four. With Pantera heading out to play arenas across the US with White Zombie, it seemed to the outside world that this was a band who were very much still stronger than all. Sadly, that wasn't the case.

In hindsight, it's hard to fully appreciate the shock that the metal scene felt when news began to emerge on July 13, 1996, that Phil had gone into cardiac arrest due to a heroin overdose, after a show at the Coca-Cola Starplex in Dallas. "I, Philip H. Anselmo," began the statement he put out in the aftermath, "...injected a lethal dose of heroin into my arm, and died for four to five minutes." It was the first declaration to the public that all was not well for the Cowboys From Hell.

Post-overdose, it became harder and harder to shake the suspicion that the brotherhood that made Pantera so beloved was crumbling. Two covers – an Anselmo-free version of ZZ Top's *Heard It On The X* with Dimebag on vocals under the moniker Tres Diablos, and their take on Ted Nugent's *Cat Scratch Fever* – were the sole releases from the band before 2000's relatively disappointing swansong, *Reinventing The Steel*.

Devildriver frontman Dez Fafara was living with Phil in New Orleans at the time of *Reinventing The Steel*'s composition, and vividly remembers the creative tensions that nearly tore the band apart before its release.

"I remember Phil and me walking out by the riverbank where he lived," says Dez today. "And him telling me he was gonna leave Pantera. I'd hear good conversations and bad.

"THEY WERE ALWAYS DIFFERENT THAN ME"

PHIL ANSELMO HAD GROWN RESENTFUL OF THE ABBOTT BROTHERS

I would see Philip get off the phone really happy because Dime loved his lyrics, and then I'd hear them flip out at each other and him slam down the phone and grab a bottle. I think he felt ganged up on by the brothers. Tensions were running really high."

When the band did return to the UK for their first full tour in six years, this writer was present at Brixton Academy on April 30, 2000 to witness what turned into a car-crash performance. As Phil staggered around the stage, slurring incoherently for minutes on end between songs, his bandmates stood and seethed in the background. Dimebag in particular was visibly unable to hold in his ire as Pantera managed a paltry 13 songs in a two-hour set. It would be their last-ever UK show.

The odd couple: Dez Fafara lived with Phil Anselmo in New Orleans

As Pantera wound down the touring cycle for what would be their final album, Phil began to concentrate on other projects. Both Down and Superjoint Ritual released records in the year 2002, with no sign given by Phil of a return to his 'day job'.

"People always say Phil ruined Pantera because he did Down and Superjoint," Dez says. "But he got forced to do those projects because he felt like his creativity wasn't happening."

After relationships in the band broke down, Vinnie and Dime formed Damageplan

Meanwhile, Down guitarist Pepper Keenan is loathe to blame Pantera's dissolution on Phil's extra-curricular activity.

"Down were playing to about 300 kids at this time," he shrugs. "I can't see how anyone could think that would be a threat to Pantera."

It would seem that Dime and Vinnie agreed, allowing Phil space to explore his urges. But when no compromise could be reached ("there was a communication breakdown and things went sour", Phil admitted), Pantera was over and the Abbotts formed Damageplan. Then, the world at large was given an insight to just how deep the ill feelings ran.

Much has been discussed about the war of words that played out in the press in the aftermath of Pantera's dissolution. In 2003, Vinnie Paul implied Phil was using again, saying he couldn't "keep his fucking eyes open" while talking about 'Superdope Ritual' on MTV ("I've been fuckin' stone-cold sober for fuckin' two years... and you know, I can have a couple of beers, let's get it straight," Phil hit back). The aforementioned interview that Phil gave this magazine in 2004 featured the quote about Dime that must still haunt him to this day.

"So physically, of course, he deserves to be beaten severely," he said of the guitarist and his former friend. Sadly, we all know that Phil and Dime – and, indeed, Vinnie – would never get the chance to make amends with each other. And no metal fan could be blamed for wondering if time would have eventually healed that rift.

"I think the brothers really tried to come together to rekindle that thing," offers Dez. "Philip did too, but it was too far gone. If something glows so bright, it's gonna dim soon. It cannot continue to glow that bright for 30 years."

While their legacy still casts a mighty shadow, it was a crushing shame that Pantera's rule ended in tears. ✠

Drag The Waters
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

Released as a single in advance of *The Great Southern Trendkill*, this fairly traditional but hugely potent Pantera stomper is notable for the rare sound of Vinnie Paul playing a cowbell. Looking back, it's hard not to wish he did it more often.

Suicide Note Pt. I
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

Memorably and beautifully covered by Zakk Wylde to commemorate Dimebag's passing, this woozy, lysergic ballad showcased the true depth and strength of Phil Anselmo's voice as he wrestles with the trials of mortality and the lure of oblivion.

Suicide Note Pt. II
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

In stark contrast to *Part I*, the second half of *Suicide Note* sounds like a sustained bombing raid in Hell. Phil has never sounded angrier, his bandmates are locked together in destructive harmony and yes, Anal Cunt's Seth Putnam turns up again. Horrible.

Living Through Me (Hell's Wrath)
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

One of the less wilfully unhinged moments on *TGST*, *Living Through Me* combines punchy *Vulgar*... vibes with Pantera's still-blazing love of extremity, resulting in a whisky-guzzling Southern metal assault that swings like a buffalo's ballbag.

Floods
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

Often voted Dime's greatest-ever solo, the one the late legend plays at three minutes and 50 seconds into *Floods* possesses a unique magic. A thrilling snapshot of a revered musician at the height of his powers, it turned a great song into a classic.

"THEIR LOVE ALWAYS PREVAILED"

In a special interview, Dimebag Darrell's longtime girlfriend Rita Haney talks growing up with the Abbott brothers, the loss of Vinnie and what made the duo the beating heart of Pantera

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

YOU KNEW BOTH VINNIE AND DIME FROM A YOUNG AGE. CAN YOU REMEMBER FIRST MEETING THEM?
"We were little kids, about eight years old. They just lived around the corner from my cousin."

OBVIOUSLY YOU AND DIME ENDED UP CLOSE, BUT WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION OF VINNIE WHEN YOU MET HIM?
"Vinnie was always very well disciplined and he was always focused. It's funny; he was really into going to this military cadets thing out by the airport, a kind of summer camp thing. So all of us went – me, my cousin, Darrell and Vinnie, and my cousin's mom dropped us all off. Vinnie was really into it, and he went all the time, but the rest of us lasted about one day! All the marching and stuff just wasn't our cup of tea but Vinnie… he had that business mindset, even as kids. Darrell was always about Evel Knievel and being the daredevil."

WHAT WERE THE BROTHERS LIKE TOGETHER BACK THEN?
"They did everything together, ever since I can remember. Even all the way until 2004, the whole time Darrell and I lived together, his first phone call of the day was always Vinnie and he'd get the lowdown of the day and what was going on, whether they were in the studio or whatever. He was like that as a kid, too; Vinnie always took care of their allowances and the money they would make from playing shows. He was always big brother. They shared everything together."

DID YOU EVER SEE THEM FALL OUT?
"Of course, that happens with everyone. They butted heads, but the longest I ever knew them in an argument was during that last run of going out for Damageplan. Darrell was really starting to get upset over the way [Vinnie] was being – nobody really understood why he all of a sudden started saying, 'I'm not playing Pantera songs.' Darrell was like, 'Yeah, you are, you knew this is who we were, we're not going to deny people.' Darrell tried to have some words with Vinnie about it and he kinda blew him off, and Darrell had a little bit to drink and just got pissed off and was like, 'I'm not going.' Vince was calling me, like, 'He's not answering any of my calls, has he said anything?' For three days, he kept calling me and then finally, the night before Darrell's flight was supposed to leave [for the tour], he called and I was like, 'Yeah, he'll talk to you,' and Darrell was like, 'Alright, I'll be there, I ain't gonna let people down.' That's the longest I've ever seen them argue and the worst argument I've seen them have. Other than that, if they butted heads and disagreed, it wouldn't last more than a few hours. It's like kids: you get mad at each other and then you're back playing the next day. They were brothers, so no matter if they disagreed on whatever, the love always prevailed."

Vinnie, Rita and the brothers' father Jerry at the Hollywood RockWalk in 2007

WHAT WAS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THEM THAT MADE THEM CLICK MUSICALLY? IS IT DIFFICULT TO PUT YOUR FINGER ON?
"It was magical. It is hard to say, but Vinnie needed Darrell as much as Darrell needed him. I think the dynamics of them both being so opposite yet so much the same worked for them; they both needed the difference in each other to create that magic. They were the type that would finish each other's sentences; they knew what each other was thinking."

A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO WERE AROUND THEM SAY THE TWO OF THEM WERE VERY KEEN ON TOUR PRANKS…
"It started with Darrell when we were really young kids but Vinnie always got in on it, too, wherever he could. It grew, and Darrell's pranks rubbed off on you, especially after Darrell was gone. I know it sounds crazy but it all made Vinnie a better person – as far as the things he didn't pay attention to before,

THE 50 GREATEST PANTERA SONGS EVER

(Reprise) Sandblasted Skin
(The Great Southern Trendkill, 1996)

Tuned down to G (which in layman's terms means VERY HEAVY) and exhibiting a clear affiliation with the death metal scene, *TGST*'s closing track was no happy ending: *'Exterminate, it's all fake!'* roars Phil over yet more pulverising riffs.

Where You Come From
(Official Live: 101 Proof, 1997)

Lurking at the end of Pantera's revered 1997 live album *Official Live: 101 Proof*, this *Trendkill* outtake clatters along on a classic, staccato riff before blossoming into a snake-hipped, sun-scorched chorus and an exquisitely deranged solo from Dime.

Hellbound
(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

Neither a four-year wait nor the challenges of a new millennium could stop Pantera from sounding harder, bolder or more effortlessly imperious than they did on this scything opener from their final studio album. *'Hellbound, in Fort Worth, Texas'* – yeehaw!

Goddamn Electric
(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

When Phil sings *'Your trust is in whisky and weed and Black Sabbath'*, it's hard to refrain from furiously nodding your head in agreement. *Goddamn Electric* was a hymn to the glory of heavy fucking metal, performed by the genre's undisputed kings.

Yesterday Don't Mean Shit
(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

Reinventing…'s biggest anthem packed a hefty whack, musically *and* lyrically. A rabble-rousing demand for people to stop wallowing in the past, it was underpinned by one of those infectious grooves that only Pantera could conjure.

Dime and Vinnie "needed each other to make the magic" says Rita

STUART TAYLOR, FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

he definitely did after. He made sure he got up and gave you that hug and told you he loved you, when he really didn't when we were growing up. Sometimes you could walk in the room and he'd never even say hello to you. [Later], he'd be a whole different person, like, 'Oh hey, how're you doing? What's up, Rita?' He really picked that up and made sure he kept the spirit of Darrell for everybody. He helped carry and pass that on, but yes, he was a good prankster, too. I think they both had it in them, but I'd say Darrell got you more than Vinnie could."

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU HEARD ABOUT VINNIE PASSING?

"I'd just flown into Fort Worth – we have this legal thing that we're all dealing with for Darrell's estate, the guitar company and so forth. I'd spent all night long reading over everything, I had two hours' sleep. I came home, and then I started getting these phone calls from Kim [Zide Davis, Pantera's manager] and I didn't answer. I thought it was going to be about the case. I texted Vinnie and said, 'Yay, team Dime' and I'd been hearing from our lawyers that I did really good, blah blah blah. I was in a good place, I thought it was a good day. Kim texted me in capitals, 'PLEASE PICK UP', and I answered at the steakhouse and she was like, 'Go outside,' and I did and she told me [about Vinnie] and I just started to cry. There were a lot of things we still had left to do, it was so unexpected. Vinnie had a lot of vitality and I'd just seen him in April. We'd just spent a couple of days together in Tampa and we were laughing and telling stories. We actually had a really good time spending a holiday together, and I'm glad I have that."

WHEN *HAMMER* INTERVIEWED VINNIE HE SEEMED LIKE AN INCREDIBLY GENUINE GUY...

"He was always so bubbly, so full of vitality and energy, and this is not at all what I thought was on the cards so quick. It's good to talk about it."

HOW DO YOU THINK VINNIE AND DIME WOULD LIKE TO BE REMEMBERED – AS BROTHERS, AS A PAIR, AS MUSICIANS AND AS ICONS IN THE WORLD OF METAL?

"I'd say always as having a good time and celebrating and putting a smile on your face when you think of them. That's what it does; it makes you smile, and when you hear their music and think of their antics in their videos, that's how they were day and night. They didn't put on a facade for the camera, they were reality TV, that's what they were about – making everyone around them have a damn good time. I hope that's how everyone always remembers them." ✠

Revolution Is My Name

(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

One of the more overtly positive and inspirational songs in the latter Pantera canon, this straightforward riff monster presented Phil in full Southern-fried bluesy mode, perfectly complementing Dime's salutes to Sabbath and ZZ Top.

Death Rattle

(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

It's hard to deny that the last Pantera album was less extreme than its immediate predecessors, but *Death Rattle* still kicks off like a drunken punch-up, with spiky, atonal riffs and numerous jarring detours crammed into its three breathless minutes.

Uplift

(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

An underrated gem with a distinctly un-Pantera-like title, *Uplift* conjures images of a booze-ravaged Phil playing chicken on the highway, but with extra riffs and a palpable sense of mischief in the song's warped, wayward arrangement.

I'll Cast A Shadow

(Reinventing The Steel, 2000)

A grand and belligerent way for Pantera to bow out, this brooding paean to rising from the ashes now seems unbearably poignant: *'When I die, I cast a shadow / And I'll rise, I cast a shadow.'* For all their fire and fury, this band had the souls of poets, too.

Piss

(Vulgar 20th Anniversary Edition, 2012)

A long-lost outtake from the *Vulgar...* sessions that emerged in April, 2012, *Piss* contains a large chunk of what would become *Use My Third Arm* on *Far Beyond Driven* two years later. Regardless, this rips and you can't knock that title.

STREAM OUR PANTERA MEGAMIX AT TINYURL.COM/PANTERAMIX

GETTY

The senseless murder of Dime (pictured here just a few months before) changed the music industry forever

"AFTER DIME, THE WORLD CHANGED"

Dave Mustaine, Sebastian Bach and Chuck Billy discuss how the aftermath of Pantera's implosion didn't just affect metal, but the culture of music itself

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

Dimebag Darrell's tragic murder onstage at the Alrosa Villa in Columbus, Ohio on December 8, 2004 during a gig by his band Damageplan, was a pivotal moment for metal. As well as robbing the scene of a figurehead – and, more personally, Vinnie Paul of a brother – it marked a definitive full-stop on the career of one of the greatest bands of them all.

Until that point, there had always been a hope that the Abbott brothers and Phil Anselmo could reconcile their differences. Dimebag and Vinnie had dealt with the fall-out from that band's unseemly demise by forming Damageplan, though they never came close to their old outfit's success. Phil could be found juggling several bands at any given time, from Down to Superjoint Ritual, seemingly happier at home in metal's underground. But Pantera's dissolution, while bitter and rancorous, never seemed quite final.

"I know Vinnie Paul was upset when Pantera split up," says former Skid Row singer Sebastian Bach, who brought the Texans out on the road with his former band in 1991 and also opened for them as a solo artist in 1998. "Him and Dime were from a musical family, and Pantera was a family, too. There's no way he would have ever started Damageplan if Pantera had kept going."

Dave Mustaine, another old friend of Pantera, sees it quite differently. "There are always three sides to every story," says the Megadeth frontman. "There's my side, your side and the truth. The guys had their own thing and it felt like they were happy."

Dimebag Darrell's death changed that. In Vinnie's eyes, Phil had been indirectly responsible for his brother's death due to controversial quotes he had made to *Metal Hammer* only a few weeks earlier, in which he suggested the guitarist should be "beaten severely".

Despite all that, rumours continued to swirl that the band would one day reunite – although they were more based on hope than any concrete proof. But even if Vinnie had eventually forgiven Phil – something he showed no sign of doing right up until his death – no-one wanted to resurrect Pantera without Dimebag Darrell. In every interview he did, Vinnie ruled out the prospect. It was one of the few things he and his former singer still agreed on. "No," insisted Phil. "Will never be done."

Dimebag's death prompted another, unforeseen change as venues began tightening up security. Today, precautions against violent attacks – whether deranged lone gunmen such as Dime's murderer Nathan Gale (who also killed three other people at the show) or premeditated acts of terrorism such as the massacre at the Bataclan in Paris – include everything from mandatory bag searches to full-scale, airport-style body scanners. It has undeniably altered the psychology of gigs, not least for the people up onstage.

"SINCE DIME'S DEATH, I DON'T GO OUT WITHOUT A SECURITY GUARD"

DAVE MUSTAINE SAYS DIME'S MURDER CHANGED HIS LIFE

"The world changed after that event," says Testament frontman Chuck Billy. "You have to be more aware and more alert. You have to look at each exit to see where you would escape if something like that were to go down again. We live in a very different world now. But there's still a lot of holes in it, because you get someone who can speak well and get a phoney pass and they can get in anywhere."

"Maybe I'm living in a bygone era, but what happened to Darrell changed my life," says Dave Mustaine. "Now I don't go anywhere without a security guard. People can look at me and say, 'Oh, look, he has to have his security guard with him!' Well, yeah, I do. You never know when people are going to take something you say wrong."

In the years following Dimebag's death, Pantera's legacy grew even stronger, though the distance between Vinnie Paul and Phil Anselmo remained as wide as ever. In 2015, the singer found himself at the centre of a storm of controversy after performing a Nazi salute and yelling "White power!" during a tribute show to Dimebag in LA.

After initially refusing to apologise for his actions, he soon rowed back. "It was ugly, it was uncalled for and anyone who knows me and my true nature knows that I don't believe in any of that," he said in a video statement. "I am 1,000% apologetic to anyone that took offence to what I said, because you *should've* taken offence to what I said."

Vinnie Paul offered no sympathy for his former bandmate. "I can't speak for him," said the drummer in 2017. "He's done a lot of things that tarnish the image of what Pantera was back then and what it stood for and what it was all about. And it's sad."

When Vinnie passed away on June 22, the pair remained estranged. The question of whether they would have ever made up, let alone eventually reformed Pantera, will forever remain unanswered. But what they achieved, alongside their bandmates Rex Brown and Dimebag Darrell Abbott, will stand forever. ✠

The brothers were happy in Damageplan and gave no indications of a Pantera reunion

Dear Lzzy:

From playing talent shows in rural Pennsylvania to headlining international venues, Lzzy Hale's come a long way. We asked the Halestorm singer to write a letter to her younger self

WORDS: LZZY HALE (AS TOLD TO EMMA JOHNSTON) • PORTRAITS: JEREMY SAFFER

Growing up in rural Pennsylvania will make your family bond strong, which will be the foundation of the band. But you'll realise you're different to the local girls. This is your strength. For two years when your family lives in a log cabin in the woods, you and your brother, Arejay, get very close, because there are no neighbours in any direction. We start playing instruments and then we move to a 20-acre farm. You are 11, and this is the year that you find out that you are a different kind of girl than your peers, and you're not cool. You're a shy child, but when you ask your parents if you're weird, they say, 'Absolutely not, you need to be unapologetically yourself and that's OK if you stand out.' That's a big life lesson, because you later use that as a form of pride and carry that with you in the band.

You will be nervous the first time you play live in front of an audience, but you will instantly know that's where you're

"YOU PLAY GUITAR BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BE A BADASS"

LZZY STARTED LEARNING WHEN SHE WAS 16

Lzzy Hale: one tough cookie

supposed to be. Arejay and you start jamming together, and sign up for your first show, the Schuylkill County Fair talent show. You're so nervous. You're 13, your brother is 10. He turns to you on the car ride and says, 'We can't go up there as Lzzy and Arejay Hale, we need a band name. What about Halestorm?' And 20 years later, you'll keep it! You get the bug for performing. A couple of nights after that, Arejay slips this little piece of paper under your bedroom door, and it's a 10-year-old's version of a contract. 'I Arejay Hale promise to be the drummer for Halestorm, and we're going to be the biggest band in the world.' You still have the same dynamic today.

Halestorm: still best friends after all these years

PRESS

People will try to put you in the Christian rock bracket, but you realise religion isn't the path for you. For about five years we go to church because our parents want us to have good morals. They are rebellious rock fans and have this childish reckless abandon approach to parenting. But they want us to be grounded, too, so those were a lot of our first venues. But when you start questioning things that people don't have the answer to, you end up getting out of that whole scene, and your parents support you in that.

You mother is your ally. When you're 16, you start to play guitar because you want to be a badass. You go to have your first lesson with a guy, and after the lesson mom says, 'I think we're going to find you somebody else.' She later tells you that the guy pulled her aside and said, 'I would love to teach your daughter, but girls do not pay attention and they don't play this instrument, so I don't want to waste my time teaching somebody who isn't serious.' You get your balls from your mother, and she tells him off and says, 'If you had paid any attention to the things that she talks about every day, you'd know that she is very serious about doing this, and you're going to regret that.'

When you're picked on in middle school, your mom will always reassure you. That's how your song *Dear Daughter* will come into play. All of those situations are the little foundations for when you get out in the real world and carve your own path – you take those things with you. Being homeschooled at high school will make you work harder. You take it as a form of pride. After doing your schoolwork you can then work on music. You work ahead of schedule and end up graduating when you're 17 because of that drive. You feel special that you have the opportunity to get ahead of the game with the music. You would rather have the memory of starting out with the band during high school than having your first cigarette in the bathroom.

You'll be surprised by some people's reactions to you as the leader of a rock band, but you'll use their ignorance to your advantage. In the beginning, you're blind to the limitations and the common misconception that girls can't or shouldn't. You never have that in your brain, and of course that's ridiculous, so you carry that through, even after you are aware of that glass ceiling that everyone talks about. You just take it and use it as a weapon. One day you're restringing your guitar side-stage and some of the members from some other band that were playing come up to you and say, 'Oh, that is so cool of you, my girlfriend never does that for me when I have to restring my guitar.' You can't tell if he's being a jerk or he just genuinely does not think. Either way, it's offensive! But you laugh it off and think, 'I'll show them.' You take those things and you use them as your power.

You feel like an outsider now, but one day you'll inspire a new generation of girls who love heavy music. It's great to see these girls that are looking up at you onstage and seeing this rock thing for the first time, seeing the magic of it. You'll love being able to say, 'Don't ever let anyone tell you that you can't or shouldn't, because I'm living proof that you can achieve all of your dreams!'

You'll pride yourself in the long and slow, steady journey. By the time you get to the point where you're getting attention from a major label, Halestorm have a really good idea of who you are and who you don't want to be. There's the same battles you were battling when you were a local band, but now you've moved up a level and there's different pressures. It's going to take a while, but be proud of that, be proud that you're doing it the long and slow way and make sure with every step you make yourself ready. It's important to respect that legacy and what you're building.

"YOU GET YOUR BALLS FROM YOUR MOTHER"

SEXIST GUITAR TEACHERS DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST LZZY'S MOM

One day you'll win a Grammy for *Love Bites (So Do I)*, and it'll be one of the most exciting days of your life. But you'll never forget your roots. As an adult, you'll find the trophy from your first talent show, where you get third place. You'll put it right next to your Grammy! You'll be proud of the Grammy, but you'll realise that what's a huge accomplishment is the fact you're still here, you still love each other, you're all still best friends and you got to go from the talent show to the Grammy in this long span of tremendous ups and downs and everything in between. What we learned from that talent show is the music chooses you, you don't choose it. You learn that it is possible to overcome shyness.

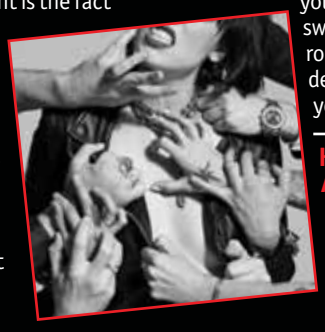
You're attracted to both men and women, and your honesty about this will help others. It's something that you admit to yourself very early on but don't say anything for a while. But this band and music gives you the confidence to be vocal in a very public setting about it, because you're comfortable in your own skin, and you would like to show that to the people who follow you. You consider sexuality the same as music. It's free, and it's genderless, and it's for everyone. You have to own yourself – be unapologetic regardless of whether anybody else understands you, or if it makes somebody uncomfortable. You have to make yourself happy.

At a rock show, a kid will came over to you and give you a hug, and tell you, 'I need you to call me Tom.' She will cry in your ear and tell you she can't talk to her parents about it, and she can't be herself at school, but she wants to start dressing the way she wants to dress and she's tired of living a lie. It's so amazing to be that for somebody. You encourage her, and end up keeping in touch, and she's taking steps to do that. It's amazing to see that. Just to be a part of it.

In 2018, you'll tour with Maria Brink from In This Moment and Ash Costello from New Years Day, just because you just wanted to hang out together. The audience is a far cry from when you first start touring, in that usually it's about 70% male, and that completely flips on this tour – it's 70% women. And you're seeing this living proof that music, and heavy music specifically, is genderless, because you see all these women making these same moments, and owning these feelings that you get from this genre of music, and it's amazing to see them so empowered and to be part of that.

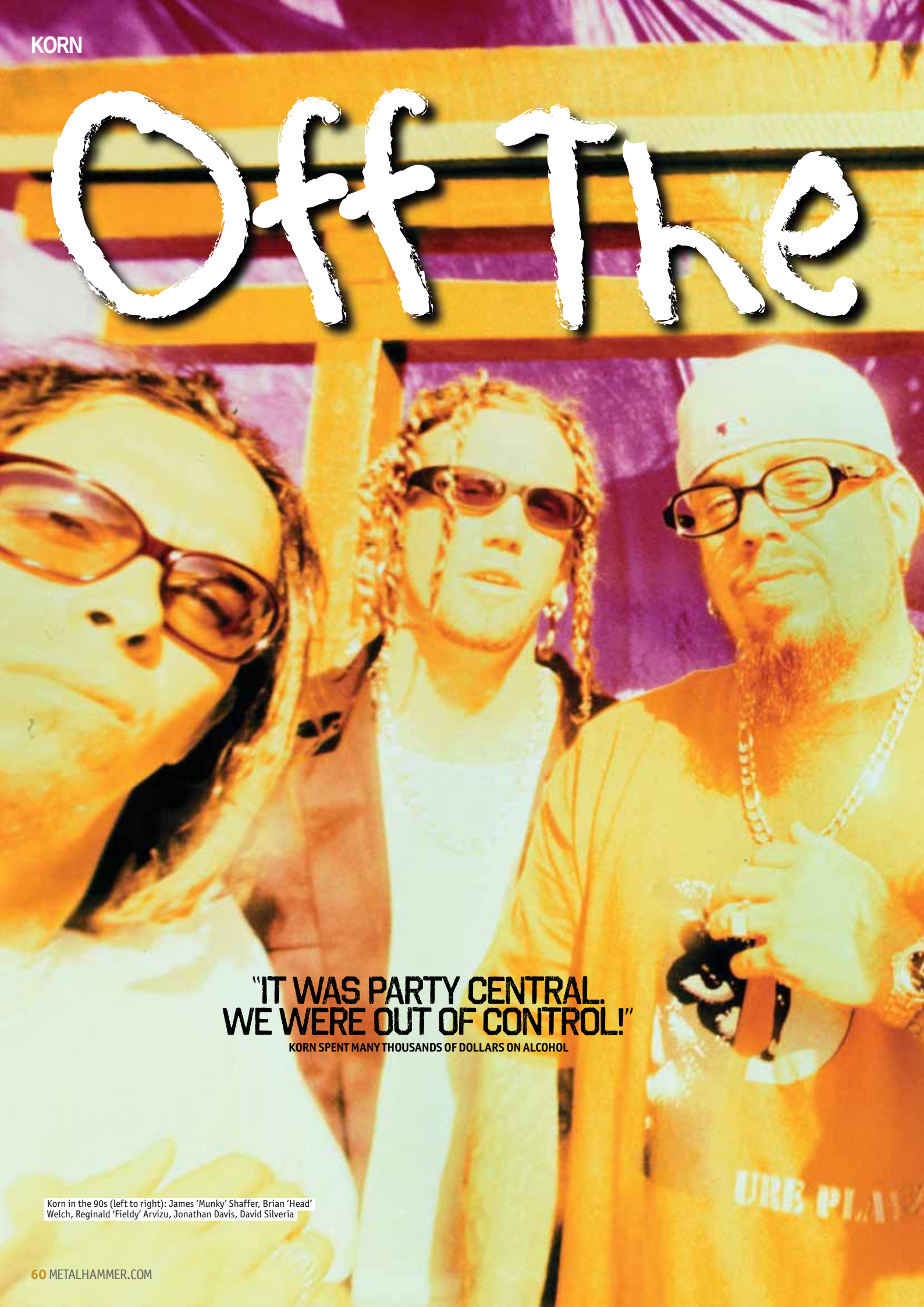
When you're starting out at talent shows, success seems a long way off. But by 2018, you're touring the world and releasing your fourth album, *Vicious*. The new album is a journey for yourself. You start writing this record in January 2016, but when you listen to the songs, you don't like them. You feel uninspired and like you're repeating yourself. Thankfully, you have amazing bandmates going through it with you, who lift you up. The producer, Nick Raskulinecz, says, 'I want the four of you, as bandmates and best friends, to use this small studio.' He helps us find our mojo again.

One of the standout lines on the record is, *'What doesn't kill me makes me vicious'*, because it is so much more than being strong. You've been strong, you can take it, but in order to get through this particular obstacle in your head you have to be fierce and to come out swinging. It's always eyes forward, rock forward. You'll always have this desire to stay hungry and to prove yourself every single night. ✠



HALESTORM'S FOURTH ALBUM, *VICIOUS*, IS OUT NOW VIA ATLANTIC. HALESTORM TOUR THE UK IN SEPTEMBER – SEE P.109

Off The



"IT WAS PARTY CENTRAL. WE WERE OUT OF CONTROL!"

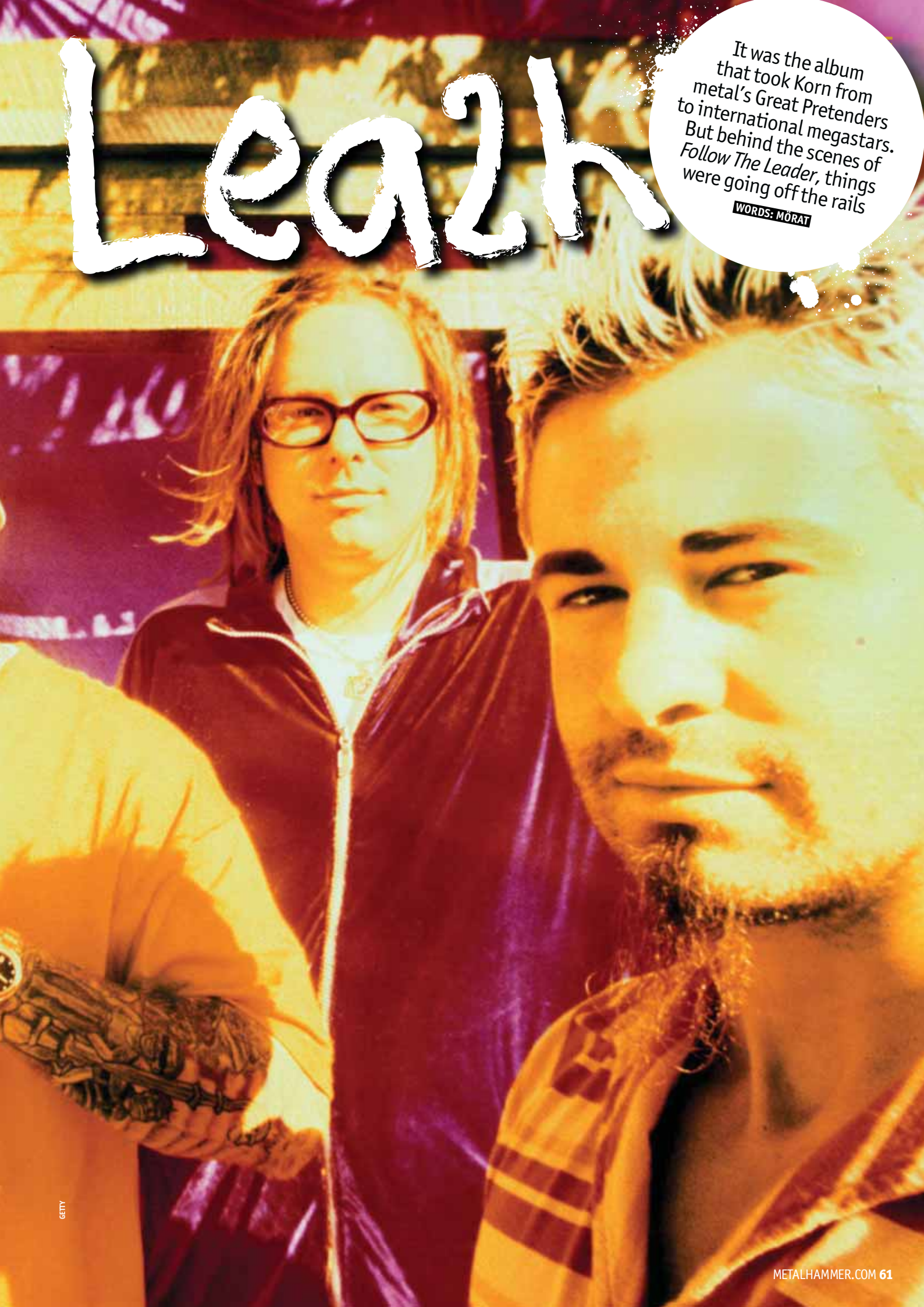
KORN SPENT MANY THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS ON ALCOHOL

Korn in the 90s (left to right): James 'Munky' Shaffer, Brian 'Head' Welch, Reginald 'Fieldy' Arvizu, Jonathan Davis, David Silveria

Leak

It was the album that took Korn from metal's Great Pretenders to international megastars. But behind the scenes of *Follow The Leader*, things were going off the rails

WORDS: MORAT



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It seems crazy to be celebrating the 20th anniversary of Korn's groundbreaking third album, *Follow The Leader*, and yet here we are. Twenty years – quite literally a lifetime to younger readers who have grown up with the band. And perhaps those sounds that the band created all those years ago seem almost normal by today's standards, a template that's been endlessly copied, but rest assured they are not normal. Korn were – and still are – one of a kind: ever evolving, always leading where others follow.

It began in 1994, with their phenomenal self-titled debut album, a bolt out of the blue that was, to all intents and purposes, the birth of what became known as nu metal. An album so darkly brilliant that, even for Korn, it was difficult to supersede. By comparison, 1996's *Life Is Peachy* seemed formulaic and rushed, by the band's own admission a "fast food" album to capitalise on their success. "It had its moments, but half of us didn't really like *Life Is Peachy* compared to the first album," guitarist Head admits today.

But still, the eyes of the music world were upon Korn. Playing the Lollapalooza tour in 1997 with the likes of Tool, Snoop Dogg and Tricky, they were all over MTV, their audiences growing from clubs and theatres to 'sheds', playing to thousands of people. The big question was, what were they going to do next? Would they sink or swim? With Korn's trademark sound already being aped by other bands, would Korn just sound like a copy of themselves?

"It kinda felt like we'd coined this sound and then we were trying to follow it up with something we'd already done," agrees guitarist Munky. "So when *Follow The Leader* came around it was like, either we're gonna make the same record for the next 25 years or we're gonna be a band that evolves. I think that was the turning point."

As the title suggests, *Follow The Leader* was intended as a raised middle digit to the copyists, proof that Korn couldn't be left in their own wake.

"Now we think it's cool," says Munky. "But at the time we were like, 'Man, this is bullshit, people trying to sound like Korn.' We'd created something that was different, but right after the ...*Peachy* album we were starting to hear bands that sounded like us, so we took a left turn. They thought they knew the formula, and all of a sudden we put out this record that's hip hop, rock, metal... If you listen to the first album and *Follow The Leader*, it's almost like two different bands."

Having written future classics *Freak On A Leash, Got The Life* and a handful of other tunes, Korn made camp at NRG studios in Los Angeles in spring 1998. They were experimenting with the latest technology and working, for the first time, with producer Steve Thompson. Given that Ross Robinson had produced the first two albums and was known to be an integral part in creating their sound, it was a bold move to say the least.

"We just wanted to try something new," explains Head. "Ross was an awesome, ground-breaking producer who taught us a lot, but he was like a leader, and the best leaders should be able to train people and then send them out. And I feel like that's just what Ross did... and

All set to party at the MTV Video Music Awards in 1999

JD in 1998. "Digging deep and pulling up gold and diamonds..." GETTY

Munky and Head in LA, September 1998

"The studio sessions were chaos," remembers Munky STEVE THOMPSON

GETTY

"THERE WAS DEBAUCHERY AND NIPPLE PIERCINGS!"

Along with Toby Wright, Grammy-winning producer Steve Thompson was charged with getting the best sound from Korn for their third album. It was no easy task…

HOW DID YOU GET THE JOB?
Steve: "I went to LA with my manager and we met in a rehearsal studio. I could tell that they'd interviewed tons of people and were ready to go back with Ross, so I said, 'Why don't we work on one song and see if the chemistry is there? I wanna get the essence of the band and turn it up to 11.' So I said to Jonathan, 'I wanna make sure that when people hear you sing they feel your pain and emotion.' He gave it so much that at the end of the performance, he literally passed out. They definitely stepped up to the table."

HOW WAS IT WORKING WITH THE GUEST STARS?
"I originally wanted B-Real from Cypress Hill to do the song *We Are Family* with Jonathan, but I had a big fight with Columbia because Cypress Hill were just putting out a new record and they didn't want it to conflict. I said, 'With all due respect, you're fucking wrong! This album's gonna be huge!' Meanwhile, Fred Durst was hanging out in the studio every day, so Jonathan decided to do the song with him. It just made me crazy, because I made a song that was more commercial, but as soon as Jonathan and Fred got together it was, 'My dick is bigger than your dick', and there goes the commerciality of that song. I did get to smoke a joint with Cheech, though!"

WHY DID YOU HAVE TO MISS SOME OF THE SESSIONS?
"We spent six months on the album, working very long hours, and I got run down and developed bronchitis. I had to go on medication and the doctor said I would have to stay in bed for a couple of days. The album was almost done at that point. We had the record label president and executives come in for a listening session before I got sick, and they were blown away."

WHAT WAS THE ATMOSPHERE LIKE IN THE STUDIO?
"It was absolutely insane! We did Korn TV every Thursday in the studio, and we had debauchery like you wouldn't believe. They were doing nipple piercings and we had tons of bands come in, from Orgy to Marilyn Manson to Primus. The studio was a circus, and normally I don't like to work that way, but the band were more comfortable with that approach so I let it go. It was very stressful, because I'm a perfectionist, and I wanted to make this record second to none. The idea with this album was, 'Let's experiment and go out of the box.' Personally, I think it holds the test of time."

Steve Thompson had his work cut out sorting method from madness

then we wanted to go and do our own thing. Ross had really trained us well with melodies and doing weird sounds with the guitar, so we took it another step. The band wrote all the music together and a couple of producers worked on the record. It's been said in a blog that our songs were a mess when we sent them in, but they were not a mess – they were just like they are. There were a couple of tweaks, but the structures were all in place for almost the entire record."

"We went in the studio with Steve, and he was kinda going through some personal stuff so he kinda wasn't showing up and wasn't really engaged," Munky continues (see panel, left). "The engineer, Toby Wright, took over from that point and helped us engineer and produce the album. But Steve was there when we were doing three or four big songs on the album, and he was a big part of that. And we were fucking around a lot, too. It was chaos! So I can see why somebody would think, 'This is bullshit.'"

By all accounts, chaos is something of an understatement. Aside from putting out Korn TV on the internet every week – a show with guests including everyone from the Deftones to Marilyn Manson and porn star Ron Jeremy (another inspired move, given that household internet access was in its infancy) – the tales of partying, drugs, alcohol, and "random groupies", as Munky says, are legendary. Sessions would go from three in the afternoon until three at night, sometimes with nothing getting done. Rumour even suggests that frontman Jonathan Davis wouldn't sing unless he had cocaine.

"Yeah, he'd want some Jack Daniel's and a line of blow," nods Munky. "He got sober immediately after that album, that's how fucked-up it was."

STEVE THOMPSON
Korn were let loose and free to experiment with the latest technology

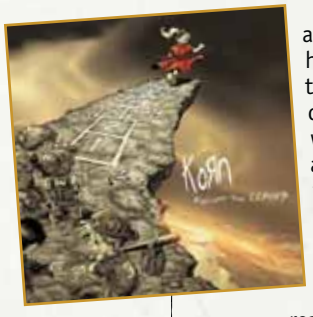
It's just who we are.
We always have a darker sound, whether it's lyrically or melodies. I'm used to him writing that way, and none of us have ever said, 'You shouldn't say that.' As a lyricist and singer, you have to be very vulnerable and expose part of who you are, and that takes a lot of courage. He exposes a lot of fear and anxiety, and ultimately that helps people because it makes them feel less alone. He's digging so deep that nothing he pulls up cannot be gold or diamonds."

Korn also had some impressive guests on the album. Along with Fred Durst – hey, it was a big deal back then – and Tre Hardson from alternative rappers The Pharcyde, they managed to get NWA's Ice Cube and no less a legend than Cheech Marin, with whom Munky smoked more than a few joints.

"I think the Cheech thing came about from Fieldy," Munky smiles. "He loves smoking weed! It's the funniest thing, because he used to hate it, and then he went through this weed phase, watching all the *Cheech & Chong* movies. Then we were messing around in the studio playing [*Life Is Peachy*'s War cover] *Lowrider*, and he was like, 'Wouldn't it be awesome if we could get Cheech in the studio!' He was

"MY HEART WAS POUNDING AND I WAS SHAKING"

HEAD WAS STARSTRUCK WHEN THEY RECORDED *CHILDREN OF THE KORN* WITH ICE CUBE



"I just remember craziness, fucking drugs, alcohol, chicks – you name it, I did it," says Jonathan.

"We were 25 to 28 years old, so it was like party central," recalls Head. "There was a lot of alcohol. Thousands and thousands of dollars! We were out of control! When you party so hard at that age it's a lot of fun, but it was the beginning of a lot of messed-up lives."

Remarkably, in the midst of all this mayhem, a classic album was somehow taking shape, with Jonathan writing some of his deepest and darkest lyrics, like *Freak On A Leash* and *Pretty* – the horrific tale of the rape and murder of a baby, prompted by his time working in a coroner's office. Not that this darkness was any surprise to the rest of the band.

"What he sang about was always dark," says Munky, "and even when he sings something uplifting, the band leans towards a minor key.

a super-nice guy and he brought his family to the show, later in that tour cycle. Then Ice Cube came into the studio and that was the first time I'd witnessed a real pro, someone that came in and killed it. He listened to the track a few times, studied it, didn't talk much and was very serious about his craft. I was blown away and it was really inspiring."

"My heart was pounding!" confesses Head, completely starstruck by meeting Ice Cube. "I had to come up with a cool riff and not let him down, and I'm shaking! Pressure! It was surreal, dude. When I was 19 or 20 I was all over NWA. The realness and the rawness… And Ice Cube's voice tones were just the best."

With the album completed and iconic artwork done by comic book creator Todd McFarlane, who later directed the award-winning video for *Freak On A Leash*, it wasn't long before Korn, too, experienced those dizzying levels of fame. *Follow The Leader* was released on August 18, 1998 and went to Number One

Korn: ahead of the game

GETTY

in four countries, including the US, making it their biggest-selling record to date. And while the band had been primed to expect huge success, confident that they'd made a great album that was unlike anything else, they had no idea how huge it would be. Head remembers that they were on the Korn Kampaign meet-and-greet tour when they heard that the album had reached the top of the charts.

"I was in a record store signing records," he says. "I don't remember the city, but I called my dad, like, 'Dad, we went to Number One!' He was always the type who was telling me to cut my hair, so he got to a place where he was like, 'Man, I was wrong about you. I should have just let you be you.' That was really cool of him to say."

But if the album was big, then the singles – *Got The Life* and *Freak On A Leash* – were arguably bigger, and they propelled the band to "a whole new level of fame" remembers Head. *Got The Life* was actually the first video to be officially 'retired' from MTV's *Total Live Request* show, because fans wouldn't stop requesting it. Korn were everywhere.

"Yeah, it got pretty crazy, and the fame did go to our heads a little bit and made us a little crazy," says Head. "Jonathan got suicidal because he was drinking so much Jack and Coke and doing cocaine. He was losing his mind, and he decided to stop it all and get sober during that tour cycle."

In September 1998, the band went out on their own Family Values tour, taking along Rammstein, Ice Cube, Limp Bizkit and Orgy. The partying continued, but Jonathan sat out on the sidelines.

"It was detoxing," he says. "All I remember is a lot of pain and anxiety and horrible shit. I would lie shaking in my bunk, and I'd get out onstage, and I could perform but then I'd go back to going through hell again. My therapy was that I'd hang out with my dear friend Rigger Dan. He passed away a long time ago, God bless him, but he taught me how to tie different kinds of knots, and I'd help him rig the show every night. I got involved with the crew, because everyone else was partying, and I couldn't be part of that."

Meanwhile, Head was still keeping up the lifestyle, struggling to reconcile the guy he was before Korn with this new celebrity rockstar. He put up a decent front, but behind the scenes he was troubled.

"The friends I grew up with, and the guy I looked in the mirror at, they all became different people. I just couldn't control the habits," he admits. "I wanted to drink alcohol and have fun, and maybe do drugs once in a while, but I didn't want them to rule me. Also, my personality... I was good with the guys and I could have fun, but in relationships I was insecure and I never felt good enough. When the fame came, it just magnified all those insecurities."

"It was good in the sense that we were able to buy new cars and upgrade from apartments to condos," adds Munky. "But it was also bad to give five guys money – we were all addicts, just buying alcohol and not thinking about tomorrow or our future. I didn't really deal with it very well. The money was new to us – we didn't grow up with money – so it wasn't like we had some financial advisor sitting us down and going, 'You need to put money away.' None of us had any of that until a few years ago, which is kinda sad. It was tough; you have all this money and a lot of addiction problems, and you buy dumb shit when you're fucked up! Cars and boats, there's no appreciation. And all of a sudden you have this crew of 10 people, all these guys who wanna leach off you and pretend that they're helping you. But the only person that's gonna help you is your mom. Everybody else is out to fucking take your money and it took me a while to see that."

Older now, and much wiser, the band have had time to reflect upon the extraordinary success of the record, and its legacy. There can be no doubt that it dragged a new (or nu) sound into the mainstream, and its influence is still heard today.

"There's also a lot of hip hop guys who got into that album,15 or 20 years younger than me, and that stuff influenced a lot of urban kids, which is cool," agrees Munky. "And it's tricky keeping people's attention and keeping them as fans, but we had hardcore fans from the first records and *Follow The Leader* blew us up. I'm floored by it." ✠

"IT WENT TO OUR HEADS. WE WENT CRAZY. JONATHAN WAS SUICIDAL"

KORN DIDN'T ADAPT WELL TO OFFICIALLY BEING THE BIGGEST THING IN HEAVY MUSIC

Korn not only sounded completely different to what had gone before, they didn't look like traditional metallers either

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KORN ARE MARKING THE ANNIVERSARY WITH THREE US SHOWS IN SEPTEMBER. THEY ARE CURRENTLY WORKING ON THEIR 13TH ALBUM

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WHEN JOEY MET FRED

Slipknot legend Joey Jordison and Dragonforce bassist Frédéric Leclercq teamed up for death metal project Sinsaenum. But how much deeper does their friendship run? To find out, we got them to interview each other…

WORDS: TOM O'BOYLE

Joey Jordison and Frédéric Leclercq: brothers from different mothers

It's the death metal supergroup to end all death metal supergroups. In 2016, Joey Jordison and Dragonforce bassist Frédéric Leclercq took up with Mayhem vocalist Attila Csihar, Dååth vocalist Sean Zatorsky, Loudblast guitarist Stéphane Buriez and bassist Heimoth to form Sinsaenum. Shedding any accessible elements of their 'other' bands, this is a project focused purely on extremity. Tearing himself from the TV during France's victory over Belgium in the world cup semi-final, happy-go-lucky Parisian Fréd and good-naturedly stoic Joey agreed to grill each other about their brotherhood and forthcoming second album, *Repulsion For Humanity*.

JOEY: WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION OF ME?
FRÉDÉRIC: "I met you in 2007 with Sam [Totman, Dragonforce guitarist]. We approached you and said, 'Hey man, you're a maggot!' You said nicely, politely, because you were sober and we were completely smashed, 'Oh yeah, that's what we call our fans.' And we said, 'No, no, *you're* a maggot.' You were puzzled! The year after, Slipknot and Dragonforce toured together for Mayhem fest in the US. You told me, 'I remember what you said to me – calm your tits, that's not cool.' I thought, 'He's not very fun.' A few days after, we started talking about Morbid Angel, and I quickly realised you were a good guy."

"I THOUGHT YOU WEREN'T ANY FUN"

FRED WAS DRUNK AND ROWDY WHEN HE MET JOEY

FRÉD: WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST IMPRESSION OF *ME*?
JOEY: "I'd always go to watch you play. The connection you had with the fans was different than a lot of people I've seen; you're one of the kindest people I've ever met in the industry, but at the same time you have a very extreme metal dark side. That's why we formed Sinsaenum – I met you for a reason, it was meant to be, like a different force coming from somewhere else. I knew instantly I had a brother; you don't find that very often."
FRÉD: [To *Hammer*] "A few years later I sent him some demos and he thought it was cool. He asked who was drumming. 'No one,' I said, '…you?' He said, 'Fuck yeah, count me in!' He was super-motivated, he wanted a timeframe for getting in a studio and whatnot, and I was like, 'Umm… OK, OK!' The songs were half done; I had to fucking get on with it!"

JOEY: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE LYRIC OF MINE?
FRÉD: "Easy, the chorus for [May's single] *Final Resolve*. I don't know if we told you, but Stéphane [Buriez, guitars] and I were stoked to be able to sit and write with you. The chorus came naturally: '*Crush / It is gripping / Crush / Sentenced to die / Crush / No more emotion / Crush / The final resolve*.'"
JOEY: [Imitates riffs and drums] "Dah dah dah dummm… dididididi!"
FRÉD: "Ha ha ha!"

FRÉD: WHAT WAS I LIKE IN THE STUDIO?
JOEY: "I'll tell you, you're one of the best coaches I've had in the studio. You know exactly what you want, because you're the primary songwriter, so it's my job to make sure that everything's done how you want it, with, of course, my intuition and originality. We worked together. It came out fucking brutal!"
FRÉD: "You're very focused. You want the best and you're not afraid of trying different things. For the previous album you recorded in the US, but we had the sense to do it together this time. That's ➤

When it comes to death metal, Sinsaenum are smashing it

something. If you're OK with it, Joey, we'll have to do that again – I had a great time."

FRÉD: WE SHARED A HOUSE WHILE WE MADE THE RECORD. WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING MY ROOMMATE? DID YOU LIKE MY COOKING?
JOEY: "We're gonna be sharing a bus together, so the house was easy!"
FRÉD: "You used to fall asleep with the TV turned up very loud – that's the only complaint I have."
JOEY: "I have to have the TV loud so I can sleep, otherwise my ears ring like a motherfucker… years of cymbals don't help!"
FRÉD: "It was very focused. We knew exactly what we wanted to achieve."

JOEY: I SUGGESTED ATTILA [CSIHAR, MAYHEM VOCALIST] JOIN THE BAND. HOW DO YOU FIND WORKING WITH HIM?
FRÉD: "It's great – I'm a huge Mayhem fan. *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* is an amazing record, but that's not how we think about people in the band. It was impressive at first. I taught him a part in a song called *Anfang des Albtraumes* from our first album, [2016's] *Echoes Of The Tortured*, and wanted him to sing like he did on *De Mysteriis*… He did it and I got chills. He's a great person, very interesting; he comes up with fucked-up ideas!"

FRÉD: WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE THING I'VE DONE ON THE NEW RECORD?
JOEY: "Everything. The songwriting is amazing; I'm 100 fucking million infinity per cent proud to be your drummer and a part of Sinsaenum."
FRÉD: "I don't know what to say! The one moment I especially remember is when you recorded *I Stand Alone* in one take. We were all behind the window watching you thinking, 'Oh, fuck!'"
JOEY: "It's cool you mention that, because when I'm practising I remember that recording experience every time. There's something eerie about that song; when I play it, I feel like you guys are in the room with me, like ghosts. It feels strong, man."

FRÉD: WERE YOU EVER FRUSTRATED ABOUT NOT BEING ABLE TO GO MORE EXTREME IN SLIPKNOT?
JOEY: "No, because we can always go more or less extreme – the fact is, we need to be honest with ourselves and the music we wanna portray and where we wanna go in life. Other than that, no."

FRÉD: WHAT'S IT LIKE GOING FROM ARENAS WITH SLIPKNOT TO SMALLER VENUES WITH SINSAENUM?
JOEY: "I don't care if a hundred or a hundred thousand people show up. We play music because we have to, period."
FRÉD: "We had a moment with Dragonforce when we were big, and then it went down and up again, and it didn't matter about the size of the venue – as long as you touch people."
JOEY: "I love Dragonforce. When we met on tour, I watched you guys all the time. I'm not a big power metal fan, but I can't say a bad thing – that band is technically *insane*."
FRÉD: "The guys called it extreme power metal when we started, because of the blasts and BPM. I guess I have more bad things to say about Dragonforce than you do! Ha ha ha! I've been with them for 13 years. I could always complain about some things, but I'm very happy."

JOEY: WHAT EXTREME METAL BAND CHANGED YOUR LIFE THE MOST?
FRÉD: "Do you have an idea of my answer?"
JOEY: "I pretty much do!"
FRÉD AND JOEY: [Both cackling with laughter] "Morbid Angel!"
FRÉD: "That was the band that connected us when we met. We'd see each other from afar and say, 'Morbid Angellllll!' That was our way of saying hi. Their approach to death metal was different to other bands. There was something evil about their sound. Their influence isn't something I'm trying to hide in Sinsaenum."

FRÉD: JOEY, WHAT'S THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION ABOUT YOU?
JOEY: "I don't know. I don't follow the internet."
FRÉD: "That's true!"
JOEY: "Fuck what anyone thinks about me. I know who I am and how strong I am. I do what I want to do. I stand by myself and I know what's right and wrong. I know what I need to do as a human being, that's it."

FRÉD: HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO FRONT A BAND?
JOEY: "No. Ha ha!"
FRÉD: "That's it?"
JOEY: "When I played guitar in Murderdolls, it was kind of fronting a band or whatever. I can sing, but you know it's just not my thing, man. When [2002 debut] *Beyond The Valley Of The Murderdolls* came out it was a free feeling – something that was locked up inside me and my guitar. The band was campy as shit, but it was fun. We'd say we were serious about not being serious. Murderdolls tours were about release – the ultimate musical vacation before we had to get back to real work."

JOEY: HOW DOES IT FEEL TO SEE YOUR MUSIC COME TO LIFE, GIVEN YOU STARTED WRITING IN 1998?
FRÉD: "It's about fucking time! When I started writing death metal in 1998, I wanted it to come out at some point, but it took me a long time. I did Dragonforce, which is a totally different emotion. All my negativity, anger, hatred goes into the Sinsaenum folder, and then we can carry on with our lives!"

JOEY: WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST AMBITION NOW?
FRÉD: "Well, what's yours?"
JOEY: "Our tour's coming up, and my ambition is to remain strong and keep moving forward, nonstop. Keep practising drums. My kit's my life, that is what I do; that's what I'm on Earth for."
FRÉD: "We're touring Europe for a month, and Russia and Japan. I want to carry on being able to do what I like to do. I already achieved a lot – not much compared to others, perhaps, but to live for my passion, to be healthy and happy."
JOEY: "I'm off to Sinsaenum rehearsals. Hail metal and hail life!"

"I KNEW INSTANTLY I HAD A BROTHER"

JOEY FELT A KINSHIP WITH FELLOW MORBID ANGEL FAN FRED

SINSAENUM'S *REPULSION FOR HUMANITY* IS OUT NOW VIA EARMUSIC. THEY PLAY LONDON IN OCTOBER – SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS

"I'M FEARLESS. WHEN YOU'RE CLOSE TO DYING, NOTHING IS SCARY ANYMORE"

A near-death experience almost stopped Doro Pesch from being able to make music at all. Over three decades later, she stands tall as one of metal's most important figureheads

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

Doro: the undisputed Metal Queen. Long may she reign!

Like most rock stars, Doro Pesch appears much smaller in real life than she does onstage. Slender, elegant and dressed in black, she still looks every inch the Metal Queen: her trademark dark eyeshadow under her piercing blue eyes, black tank top adorned with countless items of metal-as-fuck jewellery. Most importantly, she is instantly, overpoweringly charming; a disarming mixture of honesty, humility and self-deprecation. She could easily be misread as shy, but really it's just that she's conscious that her spoken English, delivered with a resilient German accent, isn't quite perfect yet.

Above all, Doro just seems delighted to be here. Poised to release her 17th studio album, she is enjoying greater popularity and success than at any time since the late 80s, when her band Warlock became one of the hottest properties around. And like everything Doro does, her new double album, *Forever Warriors, Forever United*, is a wonderfully warm-hearted and uplifting affair that sounds custom designed to bring joy to the metal masses.

"Metalheads have the best hearts and souls," she grins. "They have a passion for one thing and that's *great*. Many people don't have *anything* that they care about. Metalheads really care and that's why I can still do this, playing the shows and selling tickets and merch and all that. Everything is for them. They know that these old-school things have a real value, for sure."

As a rare female veteran of the European metal scene, Doro has long since earned iconic status. She was arguably the first woman to establish herself as a potent force in the genre, Warlock's debut album, *Burning The Witches*, emerging in 1984 to no little acclaim, and yet the curious truth behind her career is that it nearly didn't start at all. When Doro was a teenager, she was struck down with a virulent case of tuberculosis that almost killed her. In the end, her bout of ill health proved to be a defining moment.

"Oh man, I got so sick. It was for a whole year," she recalls, shaking her head at the memory. "I was in hospital and I was close to dying, like, 'Oh, man... this is it!' I was only 15, you know? I needed to stay in a good mind-frame and with a good spirit because people were dying around me, so I thought, 'If I ever get out of here alive, I will do something in music and make people happy...'"

Music was an obsession for Doro from the start. Aged three, she heard Little Richard's *Lucille* on the radio; as she recounts, a switch seemed to flick in her head and, suddenly, the course of her life was laid out before her. More interested in rock'n'roll than anything else, she hated school and preferred to spend days being driven around in her dad's truck, the radio permanently blasting. Growing up in the early 70s, she fell in love with the giant choruses and huge riffs of glam rock and bands like T. Rex, Slade and Sweet, and then began to embrace the burgeoning metal scene that took root early and hard in Germany. After surviving her brush with death and making a profound decision to dedicate her life to music, Doro joined her first band, Snakebite, within two weeks of leaving the hospital. Several ➤

Doro and her band will be hitting the road soon – don't miss them!

short-lived bands later, she was the singer in Warlock and on her way to glory. It's fair to say that she hasn't looked back since those formative days, even though early gigs were a stern test of her commitment.

"We played at a punk club in Germany one time and this guy was pointing a gun at me the whole time," Doro remembers, eyebrows raised. "He was laying on the stage, pointing it at me, and that felt a little bit uncomfortable! Ha ha! We carried on with the show and, luckily, that guy in the front row was passing out because he'd drunk himself into a coma. The fans took the gun and gave it to me onstage, in between songs, and said, 'Doro, it's loaded...' OK, wow... I was just happy to still be alive! I thought, 'OK, so *that's* what doing a gig is like...'"

Does an experience like that make you tough or were you tough already?

"Oh, it made me tough. When you start, you're young and you *want* to be tough, but I was always fearless. Maybe it was because of that experience in the hospital – when you're close to dying, nothing else is as scary anymore."

Doro's big breakthrough came in August 1986 when Warlock opened the show at the Monsters Of Rock festival at Castle Donington, with Scorpions, Motörhead, Def Leppard and Ozzy Osbourne also appearing. The first woman to perform on the Monsters Of Rock stage, she was a much-needed female presence in a male-dominated world, but Doro is keen to downplay the significance of her gender to that day's achievement.

"It honestly didn't feel like a big deal to be a woman, but it did feel like a big deal for a German band to play in England," she smiles. "That was *very* unusual. To be a metalhead, to fight for your music, to keep it going, to make records and to go on tour, *that* was the real fight. Metalheads weren't respected in the 80s, not by normal people. But as a woman it's always been great for me. I've always been supported and respected."

Stoically resistant to blowing her own trumpet, Doro has achieved plenty over the last 35 years. Early albums like Warlock's final record *Triumph And Agony,* and Doro's first bona fide solo effort *Force Majeure*, are widely regarded as classics. Somehow, she even survived the 90s, when old-school metal was struggling to retain its relevance, kicking off with the Gene Simmons-produced *Doro* in 1990 and adapting to the alt-rock times with the industrial-tinged *Machine II Machine* in 1995. Despite struggling to keep record companies onside as the Seattle Sound exploded ("All they wanted was grunge," she scowls, "It wasn't my thing at all!") and watching helplessly as albums were denied a US release, Doro's endless positivity saw her through.

"A GUY POINTED A LOADED GUN AT ME"

WARLOCK'S GIG AT A GERMAN PUNK CLUB GOT A LITTLE TENSE

Since the turn of the millennium, she has been firmly back on the righteous old-school path, partly inspired by the patronage and affection of one particularly significant friend, Lemmy Kilmister. Doro met Lemmy back in 1982 when she performed her first showcase gig in London. Accidentally bumping into the Motörhead frontman in a nearby pub, who duly got her so pissed that "the gig was a *total* disaster", she struck up a friendship that would eventually blossom into something special. In 2000, heartbroken after the death of her father, Doro flew to LA to hang with Lemmy and write some songs for her next album, *Calling The Wild*.

"I was a little lost," Doro recalls. "Lemmy breathed new life into me. We did those songs and the plan was to stay for two days, but we hung out for two or three weeks. It was so cool, we were just driving around. Lemmy would say, 'Just drive!' 'Where to?' 'It doesn't matter, just drive!' Then every day we'd be driving and talking, laughing and listening to music. Before that I couldn't really speak English, so by 2000 I could understand what he was saying, ha ha ha! It was the coolest friendship for me and he was my best friend in the music world."

One curious fact diehards will know about Doro is that she has spurned the notion of romance in favour of devoting her life to her music and her fans. "There is no husband and no kids," she smiles. "There is no drama. I've had my heart broken a couple of times and that was enough for me."

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That said, Doro's friendships, both personal and creative, are clearly of incalculable importance to the 54-year-old. She speaks fondly of the late Ronnie James Dio, glowing as she recalls how he praised her cover of Dio's *Egypt (The Chains Are On)*. Her experience making *Doro* with Gene Simmons in 1990 clearly remains a career highlight ("I love Kiss so much, I just couldn't believe it was actually him!" she laughs), and W.A.S.P.'s Blackie Lawless receives heartfelt praise for looking after Doro when she was struck down with flu on tour ("He let me have their dressing room!" she beams.)

Meanwhile, you only need peruse the list of special guests on *Forever Warriors, Forever United* to know that Doro remains a much-loved figure: Mille Petrozza, Chuck Billy, Sabaton and the late, great Warrel Dane all contribute to

"LEMMY BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO ME"

DORO RECORDED MUSIC WITH THE LEGEND AFTER THE DEATH OF HER FATHER

opening anthem *All For Metal*, while Amon Amarth's Johan Hegg throws down in an epic duet with Doro, *If I Can't Have You – No One Will*, returning the favour after Doro appeared on the Swedes' *Jomsviking* album in 2016. As with everything she does, Doro insists that the new record exists entirely as a gift to the fans that have made her life possible: a claim that might sound cheesy and disingenuous from most musicians, but Doro isn't most musicians. She's the Metal Queen.

"The fans are my biggest, truest and deepest love," she concludes. "I love people. I want to make them happy and to make them feel strong; to empower them. That's what heavy metal is about. That's always what I wanted to do in my life. I'm always happiest when I'm doing *that*." ✠

DORO'S *FOREVER WARRIORS, FOREVER UNITED* IS OUT ON AUGUST 17 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST.
DORO WILL SUPPORT SAXON IN NOVEMBER AND PLAY TWO HEADLINE SHOWS NEXT MARCH – SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS

Doro has earned the respect of metal's biggest names

HAIL TO THE QUEEN

Doro reveals her ultimate Warlock/Doro playlist

BURNING THE WITCHES
(Burning The Witches, *1984*)
"It was my first song ever on a record! I thought that was so cool. My guitar player wrote the lyrics and they're definitely metal lyrics, ha ha! We always play it live. I still love it."

FUR IMMER
(Triumph And Agony, *1987*)
"I wanted to write the most hardcore, brutal metal song ever, and then this ballad came out! It's about a deep friendship that will last forever. I have the lyrics tattooed on my arm."

ALL WE ARE
(Triumph And Agony, *1987*)
"That song took me to places that I never thought I'd go. It got heavy rotation on MTV. We did the video in Los Angeles in the river basin where *Terminator 2* was filmed! It's our biggest anthem."

I RULE THE RUINS
(Triumph & Agony, *1987*)
"This is usually our opener. It has a good drive and a great metal riff. The lyrics are full of self-confidence. I'm really proud of that one."

THE FORTUNETELLER
(True At Heart, *1991*)
"I wrote *The Fortuneteller* in Nashville with a guy called Gary Scruggs. I went to a fortune teller in LA, and told Gary the story. It's a very unique song; a beautiful, soulful ballad."

LOVE ME IN BLACK
(Love Me In Black, *1998*)
"That song is so unique. I wrote it with a guy called Jimmy Harry and we just hit it off right away. I loved him so much, I asked him to produce the album and it worked out great."

TAUSEND MAL GELEBT
(Love Me In Black, *1998*)
"This was produced by [German industrial crew] Die Krupps and it's a song about past lives. I was always very curious about that. I really believe that everyone has many lives."

IT STILL HURTS
(Raise Your Fist, *2012*)
"It was the last duet I did with Lemmy. It's very soulful and very sad. Whenever I hear his voice on that song, my heart just melts away. I love the melodies."

SOLDIER OF METAL
(Forever Warriors, *2018*)
"*Soldier Of Metal* is a song for the fans. They can count on me forever. I will always soldier on, you know? I love the melody, the feel and the sincerity of this song. I mean it!"

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST
(Forever United, *2018*)
"This song reminds me of Lemmy and all the great times we had, living it up. He lived his life the way he wanted to. He was a free spirit, and a really big idol and role model for me."

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Their blistering blackened hardcore and righteous lyrical fury has made Svalbard one of the underground's next breakout bands. This is their story

WORDS: LUKE MORTON • PICS: DEREK BREMNER

Those staring down their 30s probably discovered metal through the likes of Linkin Park, followed by a gradual introduction to Metallica, maybe dipping a toe into extreme metal, and then – BLAMMO! – a decade has passed and they're a fully paid-up member of the Manowar fan club. Svalbard vocalist Serena Cherry bypassed this route and was listening to Morbid Angel by age 13.

The self-described music obsessive was so invested in Slipknot, her Hotmail address was based on their name, and after reading a magazine feature describing each member's influences, the young, impressionable Bristolian was sent on a crash course through NY thrashers Nuclear Assault and Mike Patton's quirky Mr. Bungle. She was also lucky enough to have a super-cool record collector mum (who has one of the highest scores on BBC Radio 2 music quiz *PopMaster*), who took Serena to see some of the hottest bands of the early 00s.

"One of my first experiences was seeing Kittie [in London, 2002], and I gave Morgan [Lander], the singer, a glow-in-the-dark bracelet. She wore it for the whole set and that was a really inspirational moment," Serena says today, remembering her mosh-filled childhood while sitting in her band's rented van outside the Black Heart venue in London.

"There was something about Amen's shows that was so aggressive and liberating," she continues. "I remember thinking, 'What must it feel like to be on the other side? Being that person screaming and throwing themselves around.' Obviously you do it in your bedroom to Otep when nobody's looking! Ha ha ha! From then, I just wanted to form a band and see what performing was like."

However, performing live wasn't the first item on Serena's agenda. As an evolution from the theatrical, image-based world of nu metal, she became fully involved in the monochrome, frostbitten wasteland of extreme music. Originally finding solace in Dimmu Borgir and Satyricon, the singer was drawn to the one-man-band approach of black metal.

"It was just me and my four-track and my drum machine for quite a few years," Serena says, admitting she used to be socially awkward. "I was a massive loner as a teenager. Before I discovered metal, I was always a little bit of an outsider, and then when I got into metal it pushed me even further to a more reclusive way of thinking and being."

Eventually, though, the desire to perform live with a full band was too strong, and through sheer determination, Serena made her dream a reality. Working a Saturday job in a guitar shop, she used her wages to hire a drummer in order to play her first show supporting extreme Japanese doom merchants Gallhammer, followed by a tour with US psychedelic metallers Nachtmystium.

> "I DIDN'T WANT TO LOOK LIKE A METALHEAD ANYMORE"
>
> SERENA SOLD HER SHIRTS AFTER GETTING ASSAULTED AT WACKEN

Despite releasing three albums, Serena refuses to tell us the band's name, laughing that she finds the photos cringey.

But when Serena was 18, an incident at Wacken tarnished her love for heavy metal and she turned her back on the subculture. "I was watching Obituary and a group of guys surrounded me, forcibly grabbing my breasts and trying to shove their hands between my legs," she says, her voice dripping with disdain. "No one tried to stop them, and they were a lot bigger than me, and I just felt terrified and overpowered; it seemed like there was nothing I could do. I looked around and couldn't see a single girl, and I felt really vulnerable, threatened and uncomfortable. I managed to punch one of them and get free, then they kicked mud in my face. I didn't tell anyone what happened, I just came home and sold all my metal shirts. I didn't want to look like a metalhead anymore."

Yet Serena continued to create music. Leaving her metal guise behind, she formed a "really indulgent" solo project that involved a loop machine and singing songs about cats. While supporting a prog band in Bath, she noticed the band's driver was wearing a Dying Fetus shirt, and the pair struck up a conversation about the post-rock elements in Serena's music. This man was Liam Phelan, who would become Svalbard's guitarist. They poached drummer Mark Lilley from another band and, after going through "exactly a million different bass players", Svalbard's line-up was finalised by Adam Parrish.

Sitting with Serena in the front of her band's van, she's all smiles and laughs continuously, often going off on a tangent. At times muddling her words, confessing she finds it easier to type than talk, the shy, nervous teenage version of herself hasn't fully faded – she even whispers that her favourite band are Nightwish, like it's something to be ashamed of. But one thing that shines through is her passion for heavy music.

In 2015, Svalbard released their frenetic, blackened debut album, *One Day All This Will End*, earning them a seven out of 10 score in these very pages. But things soon went awry. After a seven-year relationship, Liam and Serena broke up, putting a strain on the band. Then, both of them were stricken with severe health problems. Liam had a bulging slipped disc, meaning he could barely stand, and Serena caught a parasitic bug from a drinking fountain in America. "It ate all my organs. Now I'm permanently scarred on the inside and can't eat properly any more," she says dejectedly. "We played 2000Trees [last year] and I collapsed onstage."

Serena took a break from performing live, with another vocalist and guitarist filling in ➤

Svalbard (left to right): Adam Parrish, Serena Cherry, Liam Phelan, Mark Lilley

RE GONNA TAKE IT

"A PARASITE ATE MY ORGANS"

SERENA CAUGHT A DEADLY BUG FROM A WATER FOUNTAIN IN THE STATES

on tour, leaving her wondering if they'd want her back. They did. Today, she speaks honestly about the sacrifices they all endure to make this band work; all of them maintain dead-end jobs and struggle financially, and Serena missed out on the birth of her niece because she was playing to 20 people in Sweden. "You get to points in life where you question how many sacrifices you're making, but I feel like we persevered and we got through it; the going got tough and it made us stronger as a unit," she says.

The result of this newfound strength is Svalbard's new album, *It's Hard To Have Hope*. A blistering, apocalyptic monster of black metal, post-rock and hardcore, baring razor-sharp teeth and a venomous tongue. Refusing to tiptoe around difficult subjects, Serena screams with brutal sincerity and passion about topics that affect human beings everywhere.

Drawing from her own experiences of sexual assault at Wacken, *How Do We Stop It?* is a raw, autobiographical display of aggression and anguish. *Pro-Life?* points the finger at religious groups for treating a woman's life as less than that of an unborn child (Serena herself was raised Catholic until aged 12). *Revenge Porn* deals with the idea of victim-blaming and the shame that comes with having your trust broken. *Feminazi?!* sticks the middle finger up to those who compare people looking for equal rights to some of the worst people in history, inspired by a YouTube comment left on the band's song *Expect Equal Respect*. And on it goes, all without metaphor or nuance, as blatant as a punch in the neck.

Taking influence from *The Times* columnist Caitlin Moran's direct, no-fucks-given writing style, and finding the confidence to be more forthright in her own words after writing the lyrics to *Expect Equal Respect*, Serena has realised she doesn't have to hide under a safety blanket. She can say precisely what she means, without resorting to fantasy metaphors found elsewhere in metal.

"Sometimes it's so unobvious that bands are singing about politics or might have a song about animal rights, because it just sounds like generic metal lingo about darkness," she sighs, contemplating the metal scene at large. "It's really easy to get shrouded in the metal tropes, and I wanted to deliberately push away from that and be as plain and unpoetic as possible."

Despite metal originally being the refuge of the outcasts and the forward-thinkers, this radical approach to songwriting hasn't always been well-received by the wider community. "If you look at metal from an objective point of view, it very much is white men getting angry about stuff. Every metaller loves the classics, they have a real concern for the history of the genre and the traditions of metal, and that's one of the things that's restricted it as a genre for so long. When you bring in leftist politics to that mix, it can get people's backs up, because despite that being a thing for a very long time – you read some thrash bands' lyrics from the 80s and it's really left-wing – people don't like it shoved down their throats."

Serena laughs that her favourite insult right now is Social Justice Warrior, although she prefers to be called a Social Justice Worrier, as she's very concerned about the issues her band cover. Regardless of the backlash, she's keen to expand her reach, especially when it comes to those outside the metal community.

"I personally would like our message to reach more feminist movements," asserts Serena, eyeing up the potential. "At the moment we're a band within metal that are singing about feminist topics; I would like for feminists outside of metal to know who Svalbard are, what our message is about and what we're doing. I want the spheres to overlap – the Venn diagram of feminism and metal to push forward with Svalbard in the middle." ✠

Serena Cherry: proud feminist

***IT'S HARD TO HAVE HOPE* IS OUT NOW VIA HOLY ROAR.**
SVALBARD PLAY ARCTANGENT ON AUGUST 16, SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS

"I'D BUILD A THEME PARK CALLED SVALBARDLAND!"

Serena's strong views are front and centre of Svalbard's music, but what would she do if she became Prime Minister?

BAN PUPPY FARMS
"I'd ban puppy farms and breeding of brachycephalic [short-nosed/flat-faced] dogs, so that all dogs can breathe properly. I'd make it as publicised and encouraged as possible to adopt before you shop, to make people seriously consider the implications of buying rather than adopting an animal."

BAN UNPAID INTERNSHIPS
"They seem to be predominant in creative spheres, because it's desirable to be a writer or work in the music industry, so people can get away with exploiting young people in the name of work experience. I would abolish it so everyone was on level footing and everyone gets paid."

SUPER-FUND THE NHS
"I'd give £1bn a day to the NHS; I'd funnel the all money right into their hands and make sure that the National Health Service was treasured and saved, and nurses and doctors were given the wages they deserve rather than being forced to work obscene shifts with no breaks."

IMPROVE BRISTOL
"I'd build a theme park in Bristol. I'm a rollercoaster enthusiast, and I have to travel for ages just to get to a theme park. I could ride rollercoasters all day when I'm not being a Social Justice Worrier. It would be called Svalbardland, and our mascot would be a polar bear."

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ARCH ENEMY AT THE GATES NAPALM DEATH
DEICIDE DEATH BEHEMOTH LACUNA COIL
CELTIC FROST DARK TRANQUILLITY NEVERMORE

ANTHEMS OF REBELLION

INSOMNIUM TRIPTYKON FINNTROLL ICED EARTH
MOONSORROW TESSERACT ARCHITECTS
ORPHANED LAND THE HAUNTED VOIVOD
TURISAS TRIBULATION PERIPHERY
SUICIDE SILENCE BODY COUNT STUCK MOJO
BLIND GUARDIAN FOZZY ROTTING CHRIST

Over three decades of noise, Century Media have helped to shape the sound of metal itself. As the heavyweight label celebrates 30 years, we relive its amazing journey

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

Back in the early 80s, Robert Kampf was just another music-mad German teenager. Having grown up with Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin ringing in his ears, he was initially wary of the nascent punk rock scene of the late 70s, but steadily grew to appreciate its energy, aggression and political edge. Soon immersed in Dortmund's own local scene, he became the singer in a band called Eklatant, alongside friend and bassist Oliver Withöft, and embarked on a career path that he had never seen coming.

"What fascinated me about punk rock was the nonconformity from society and those two fingers in the air, 'Fuck off, I'll do it my way!' attitude and approach to life," he tells us. "I liked having a different outlook on society and doing something completely different. Somehow, that led me to start a record label..."

In 2018, Robert is celebrating the 30th anniversary of Century Media Records, which he founded and steered through three decades. Today, he cites those early days in the punk scene with Oliver (who sadly passed away in 2014) as the catalyst for everything that followed.

"THIS STARTED IN A BEDROOM AND CHANGED THE WORLD"
ARCH ENEMY ARE PROUD LIFERS OF CENTURY MEDIA RECORDS

After quitting Eklatant ("I didn't really like the music much!"), he formed thrash metal band Despair in 1986. In keeping with the DIY ethos he'd learned from the punk scene, he decided to create his own label to release their first album. In 1988 he founded Century Media Records, but not before some fairly idiosyncratic money-making ideas had reached fruition.

"I had some money saved up and I did a long trip through Asia," he recalls. "Before I set out, I bought tickets for the Trans-Siberian Railway from Beijing to East Berlin. I sold 30 or 40 of them for two or three times what they cost. That financed the trip and I also suddenly had a bunch of cash. So I bought a large number of silk kimonos in Beijing and resold them in Germany. That money, together with some money I'd saved up and a little money my mum gave me, was the foundation of Century Media."

With the finances sorted and Despair's *History Of Hate* album in the can, all Robert needed now was the perfect right-hand man to crunch ➤

Arch Enemy (pictured here in 2005) have been with Century Media for 20 years. "We supply great albums and they work them very well," says Michael Amott

Napalm Death: the sonic savages are at home on Century Media

Fozzy: Chris Jericho's groovemeisters

numbers. After some lengthy persuasion, the business-literate Oliver Withöft finally agreed to pitch in with his friend and make Century Media a genuine force.

"I knew Oliver was smart and had a fearless attitude," Robert grins. "I had to talk him into it, because he wanted to become a university professor and teach. It wasn't the easiest thing, to get him onboard, but the rest is history!"

As the metal underground bloomed and the 90s dawned, Century Media steadily became one of Europe's most prominent metal labels. After a handful of low-key but well-received releases, they broke into the international market with the signing of German death metallers Morgoth, whose popularity overseas kicked open doors for both band and label, particularly in the United States. From then on, Robert shrewdly plundered the death metal scene, via bands like Asphyx and Grave (both still signed to Century Media, incidentally), while also snapping up some of the best new bands from other fledgling subgenres and parts of the world, ranging from US rap-metal pioneers Stuck Mojo to the dark extremity of Portugal's Moonspell and Sweden's Tiamat. Significantly, Robert was eager to establish good relationships with his bands, even to the extent of taking them out for a potentially life-threatening knees-up.

"That was a great time," says Robert. "When Tiamat finished recording *Clouds* [the Swedes' third album, 1992], we had Johan [Edlund, Tiamat vocalist] in town, so we went out with tons of friends of mine and did a ton of drinking. We stayed up all night and did a bunch of drugs on top of it! The next morning, we went to an outdoor trucker festival, and we all took acid and did bungee jumping. Twenty-five people, on acid, bungee jumping, ha ha! That's a great memory."

One of the most significant signings in Century Media history came in 1995, when Robert spotted the originality and potential in Holland's alt-metal ingénues, The Gathering. With new vocalist Anneke van Giersbergen setting them apart from pretty much everything, they became the first metal band with a female singer to sign to the label, a rarity at the time.

Architects: another of Century's stellar signings

Century Media signed Lacuna Coil, and even housed them for a while!

"WE ALL TOOK ACID AND WENT BUNGEE JUMPING!"

THE EARLY DAYS OF CENTURY MEDIA WERE QUITE THE ADVENTURE

"Robert saw something in us and had faith in the idea that this thing might become a little bigger," Anneke, now with Vuur, tells *Metal Hammer*. "We were already very popular in the underground scene, and I think Century Media wanted to put some more oil on that fire! We were so focused on the music, the details of it, creating a good album, I don't think we knew it was special, but Century Media recognised that fact, I'm sure."

Third album *Mandylion* (their first with Anneke) was an instant critical hit and sold well, but it was the record's lasting impact on female involvement in metal of which Anneke is proudest. Without making any grand statements, Century Media were doing their bit for the notions of diversity and equality that had been so fundamental to Robert and Oliver's punk upbringing.

"I think the label discovered the novelty in our approach and our music," she notes. "There weren't many bands using a woman as a singer at the time. Other bands followed, and Century Media signed some of them, making them sort of a specialist label. They definitely gave us the tools to grow in the scene."

Despite all the usual clichés about the 90s being a terrible time for metal, Century Media survived the decade and emerged into the 21st century in an excellent state of health. It certainly helps that one of their most unexpected signings, an Italian band called Lacuna Coil, were rapidly turning into major stars. But as vocalist Cristina Scabbia recalls, signing to such a well-known label was far beyond anything the band had originally dared to hope for.

"Twenty years ago, there were no cell phones and there was no internet, so the guys at Century Media literally took our promo cassette, saw our picture and thought, 'OK, they look interesting...'" she recalls. "I mean, they had *no idea* who we were. We were from Italy, which isn't the most metal country in the whole world. They definitely took a risk. If I think about it now, it seems very surreal. There were a lot of faxes back and forth! Ha ha ha!"

As with everyone we talk to, Cristina speaks glowingly about her band's relationship with Century Media over the years. The huge success Lacuna Coil have enjoyed since their break-through album, 2002's *Comalies*, has certainly been facilitated by the steadiness of their friendship with Robert and his staff, something that goes right back to the recording of their debut album, *In A Reverie*, in 1998.

"We were recording in a studio in Hagen and living at the Century Media office in Dortmund," she recalls. "There were six of us, living in one room with three bunk beds and one kitchen and a small bathroom. We were basically waking up, going downstairs to the office, they would offer us coffee and then we would drive to the studio. That period of my life was amazing, because we were really getting connected with them.

Anneke van Giersbergen: "Robert had faith in us"

Finntroll: one of Century Media's more, umm, *unusual* artists

It made it feel like a family vibe. It was a way simpler and more genuine time."

Century Media remained firmly at the forefront as metal underwent its huge early 21st-century renaissance. Always diverse but never forgetting to stay true to the underground scene that spawned it, the roll-call of bands from the last 30 years is frankly ridiculous: Dark Tranquillity, Napalm Death, Nevermore, Aborted, Behemoth, Insomnium, Architects, Body Count… and recent Golden Gods Best International Band winners Arch Enemy. Signed to Century Media in 1998, Michael Amott's post-Carcass crew have stayed with the label ever since.

Arch Enemy have been through a number of line-up changes over their 23 years, but it was the recruitment of vocalist Angela Gossow in 2000 that caused major consternation among diehard fans. Once again proving Robert's ability to spot a great idea, Century Media threw their wholehearted support behind the new line-up and the subsequent *Wages Of Sin* album propelled Arch Enemy to ever-greater success worldwide.

"We picked them up before Angela joined and we were fairly surprised by the choice, but we liked it immediately," Robert recalls. "Between her amazing voice and presence and Michael's songwriting, something truly magical happened and we had to be behind it all the way."

"It was a mixed bag emotionally for many people, getting a female singer into a band like Arch Enemy," Michael remembers. "But the label were hugely supportive all the way along. We were one of the smaller bands on the label when we started, but I believe that for a while we've been the *biggest* band on the label. We supply great albums and they work them very well! Ha ha ha!"

"I just always came from the viewpoint that a label should be of service to the artist and more or less like a parent is with their child," Robert concludes. "You have a responsibility for their career and that's sacred to some degree."

Partly prompted by the death of his long-time business partner and partly due to bewilderment at the endlessly mutating state of the music industry, Robert sold Century Media to Sony for £12million in 2015. But the label's story is far from over, thanks to a partnership between major label and revered independent that seems to be keeping everyone happy. Today, Robert spends his days involved in the development of "utility-scale solar farms" ("I stumbled into it and liked it!" he laughs) but he has clearly been keeping a benevolent eye on his old creation's progress.

"If the industry hadn't changed as drastically, I probably wouldn't have sold," he admits. "It was too close to my heart. But looking back, I think I made the right move at the right time and I don't regret it at all. What is most important is that Sony have been an extremely fair and good partner. They're a class act. I can't say anything different."

"I always thought Robert was a visionary," states Michael Amott. "He started in his bedroom like all the other underground labels, but it just grew into something that changed his life and mine, as well as the lives of a lot of musicians around the world. Sticking around for 30 years, that's really quite something." ✠

SEE MORE AT CENTURYMEDIA.COM

DECADES OF AGGRESSION

Ten classic albums from the Century Media vaults

MORGOTH
Cursed (1991)
As the death metal scene erupted, Germany's Morgoth became Century Media's first international success. The band's blend of slow-motion menace and turbo-thrash fury proved an immediate hit with scowling diehards everywhere.

THE GATHERING
Mandylion (1995)
After two well-received albums of atmospheric doom, The Gathering recruited Anneke van Giersbergen for this, their groundbreaking third. Her voice, combined with the band's imaginative songs, made it an instant classic.

STRAPPING YOUNG LAD
City (1997)
Never knowingly under-the-top, Devin Townsend's second outing with SYL redefined what it meant to be fast, futuristic and brutal, making Fear Factory sound like Weezer. *City* was most metal-heads' introduction to Canada's finest.

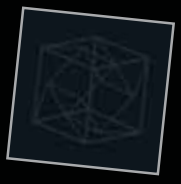
ARCH ENEMY
Wages Of Sin (2001)
Another band disregarding the status quo by recruiting a female singer, AE could hardly have sounded more confident or revitalised on Angela Gossow's first album as vocalist. Now they're unstoppable.

LACUNA COIL
Comalies (2002)
Less gothic and heavily influenced by alternative rock, Lacuna Coil's third album put the Italians in the international spotlight. With songs this grandiose and memorable, how could they fail?

FINNTROLL
Nattfödd (2004)
Pioneers of a subgenre that continues to be hugely popular, Finntroll confirmed their status as folk metal figureheads with this absurdly entertaining journey through moonlit forests.

DESPISED ICON
The Healing Process (2005)
Proving their knack for spotting the next wave of heaviness, Century Media wisely signed Canada's deathcore pioneers in 2005. Their first album for the label was an absolute monster that refined and defined a subgenre.

ORPHANED LAND
The Never Ending Way Of ORwarriOR (2010)
A sprawling masterpiece of esoteric prog metal, Orphaned Land's fourth album brought Israel's finest together with co-producer Steven Wilson. Thus, everyone from black metal fans to prog aficionados discovered their new favourite band.



TESSERACT
One (2011)
Arguably the album that most powerfully sold the idea of djent to the metal masses, Tesseract's epic and ambitious debut delivered on every level. Another shrewd acquisition by the Century team.

NAPALM DEATH
Apex Predator – Easy Meat (2015)
Living proof that the greatest bands grow stronger with age, Napalm Death's 15th studio album is arguably the finest thing they have ever released. Vicious, inventive and noisy as fuck, this is what happens when genius is given free rein.

OUT OF THE

"We were at the edge of the cliff," admits Skeletonwitch guitarist Scott Hedrick, chatting to *Hammer* on a rare day off in Hanover, amid a frantic schedule of Euro festival appearances. His band have just gone through one of the most turbulent times of their career, firing their original frontman Chance Garnette in late 2014 under controversial circumstances.

"This whole thing started with Nate [Garnette, guitar] and I in college, and now we're the only remaining original members. We walked to the edge and it was like, 'Do we want to continue this band anymore? Do we want to go through the process of getting a new vocalist?'"

To answer this question, they would have to look away from the yawning abyss and towards the path that had taken them there in the first place.

Formed by Scott and Nate in 2003, Skeletonwitch began as a way for the kindred spirits to express their creative vision while studying at Ohio University. With Nate's brother Chance on vocals, the trio would form the core of Skeletonwitch for more than a decade, growing from an act that booked shows and mini-tours during school holidays into a well-respected institution of the American extreme metal scene.

Drawing their sound from across the expansive extreme metal canon, the band could just as easily tour with death metal bands as with thrash, their sound owing fealty to both camps while never squarely fitting in with either. That didn't stop them from being lumped in with the mid-00s thrash revival movement, though ("That was totally just a proximity thing," Scott says). With this approach, Skeletonwitch were able to escape the inevitable creative stagnation that would catch up with many subgenre adherents. But, while they remained a vital force, tensions were bubbling under the surface.

"WE'VE BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH BULLSHIT"

BUT SKELETONWITCH HAVE COME OUT THE OTHER SIDE

In October 2014, during a tour with Amon Amarth, Chance stopped appearing onstage with Skeletonwitch to address what the band called "serious personal matters", and the remaining members played as an instrumental four-piece. At the same time, reports arose that he had been arrested 'on charges of assault and battery on a family/household member', an incident that proved to be the final straw for Skeletonwitch. But while they had decided to fire Chance, they didn't make an official announcement, leading many fans to believe his absence was temporary. In early 2015, the band hit the road for a European tour and drafted in Cannabis Corpse/Battlemaster vocalist Andy Horn. The message was clear: Chance Garnette was no longer part of the fold.

Chance responded with a public statement to the site Metal Injection, citing "a drinking problem" as the reason for dismissal.

Scott sighs. "I don't want to get into it too much; it would be very easy for us to make him into a villain, and I don't want that to take away from people's memories of him being a charismatic frontman, or the guy behind those shows and records. If people want to think us callous because we kicked out the guy because he was drinking too many beers… they can have

Skeletonwitch (left to right): Adam Clemans, Evan Linger, Nate Garnette, Scott Hedrick

ABYSS

When Skeletonwitch parted ways with singer Chance Garnette, they didn't know if they could carry on. Now they've got a whole new lease of life – and a kickass album to prove it

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

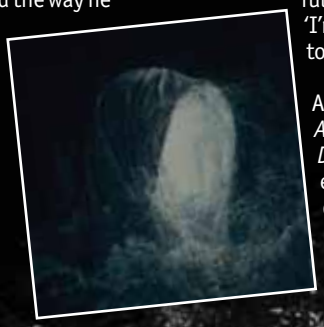
that false narrative. But it's very telling that Nate is still in the band, but his brother isn't."

The topic of Chance is unavoidable, and Scott deals with questions with the tactful grace that any sensible person would when forced to discuss an ex-bandmate. That said, some details do become apparent as we chat – that Chance's dismissal wasn't the result of a single event, but rather a number of things (the phrase "negative energy" comes up often), that even though Nate and Chance still have a familial relationship, Scott hasn't spoken to him since ("I sent an email asking if he wanted to grab coffee – he didn't respond"), and that the relationship had soured long before the eventual departure. Ultimately, though, Scott sees it as something the band had to go through to get to a better place.

"It's a bummer Chance behaved the way he did, but [the firing] was unavoidable," Scott says. "People can think we were callous or whatever if they want – we'll happily take one on the chin for the sake of moving on."

As their European tour ended, it quickly became apparent that Andy didn't have the time to join the band on a permanent basis, leaving the looming question of whether Skeletonwitch could continue with a new vocalist. Yet the bond that had been forged between Scott, Nate and long-time bassist Evan Linger won out, the trio having been through enough to know there was something special in Skeletonwitch's eclectic mix of styles and sub-genres. From there, it was a question of finding somebody they could gel with. They turned to Wolvhammer and ex-Veil Of Maya vocalist Adam Clemans, who they admired and had toured with.

"Adam was the first guy we properly tried out," Scott says. "He flew over for the weekend from Minneapolis to see if it would work, learning a bunch of old songs. He knocked it out of the park – 10 minutes or less in, it was like, 'Yeah, this guy is *our* guy.' But we kept him in the dark a little bit, which was funny because he went through the full range of human emotions, like, 'I'm the guy, I got the gig, right?!' to, 'Damn, I didn't get the gig?!'"

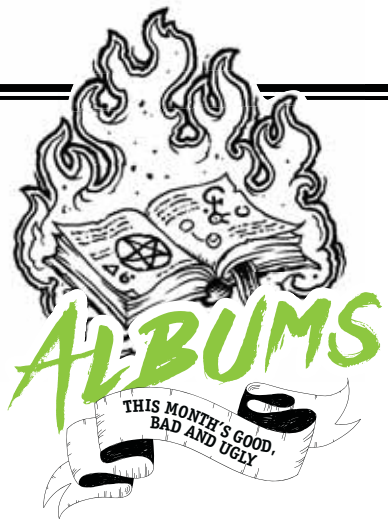


While the band demonstrated Adam's skills on 2016 EP *The Apothic Gloom*, new record *Devouring Radiant Light* expresses the full extent of their dynamic. "Adam brings a lot to the table," Scott says. "He's a big part of our new intensity; he doesn't try to be vicious, brutal or dark – it's just what he does. There's no artifice or false character there."

Now 15 years into their career, Skeletonwitch are a more refined unit. The genre-bending tendencies of the past haven't just been upheld, they have been perfected, *Devouring Radiant Light* offering up a seamless mix of furious black metal, rampaging thrash and even the transcendental pomp of prog. It is the fruit of a happier, healthier band; a record of immense ambition. With their sights set on a permanent drummer (one-time Job For A Cowboy sticksman Jon Rice is currently behind the kit – "We're definitely thinking of putting a ring on it!" Scott jokes), plus US support slots with System Of A Down and a UK tour on the horizon, 2018 looks set to be a good year.

"We've all been through so much bullshit that we're coming at this from a place of positivity," smiles Scott. "Everybody's having fun again and we can do whatever the fuck we want." ✠

***DEVOURING RADIANT LIGHT* IS AVAILABLE NOW VIA PROSTHETIC. SKELETONWITCH TOUR THE UK IN DECEMBER – SEE P.109 FOR DETAILS**



ALICE IN CHAINS

Rainier Fog

BMG

Seattle's elder statesmen reach a majestic new turning point

WITH EVERY CLUTCH of new music that arrives from Alice In Chains, there comes the debate that's persisted since the dawn of the 90s: whether AIC helped to pioneer Seattle's grunge movement. While it's true that they caught their break in Seattle during the rise of that genre, the Sabbath-loving heavyweights bear little in common with true grunge pioneers like Mudhoney or Green River. For more than 30 years, Alice In Chains have fastidiously cultivated an utterly pulverising sound, erupting with skyscraping harmonies and ginormous, fuck-off hooks big enough to rattle the walls of a stadium. Effectively, Alice In Chains were *never* simply a 'grunge' band.

After three albums with original vocalist Layne Staley, who passed away in 2002, the surviving members – guitarist/vocalist Jerry Cantrell, bassist Mike Inez and drummer Sean Kinney – brought guitarist William DuVall onboard in 2006. Together they released two massively successful outings, 2009's *Black Gives Way To Blue* and 2013's *The Devil Put Dinosaurs Here*. Longtime fans rejoiced and new ones jumped onboard, but the question lingered: where do they go next?

Rainier Fog marks a number of firsts for Alice In Chains. For the first time in 20 years, the band recorded in their hometown of Seattle. The record is also their first with new label BMG. Opener *The One You Know* invokes the core AIC elements right out of the gate: the droney guitars, lush double-lead vocals and chilly melodic progressions. But when the velvety harmonies of the chorus kick in amid

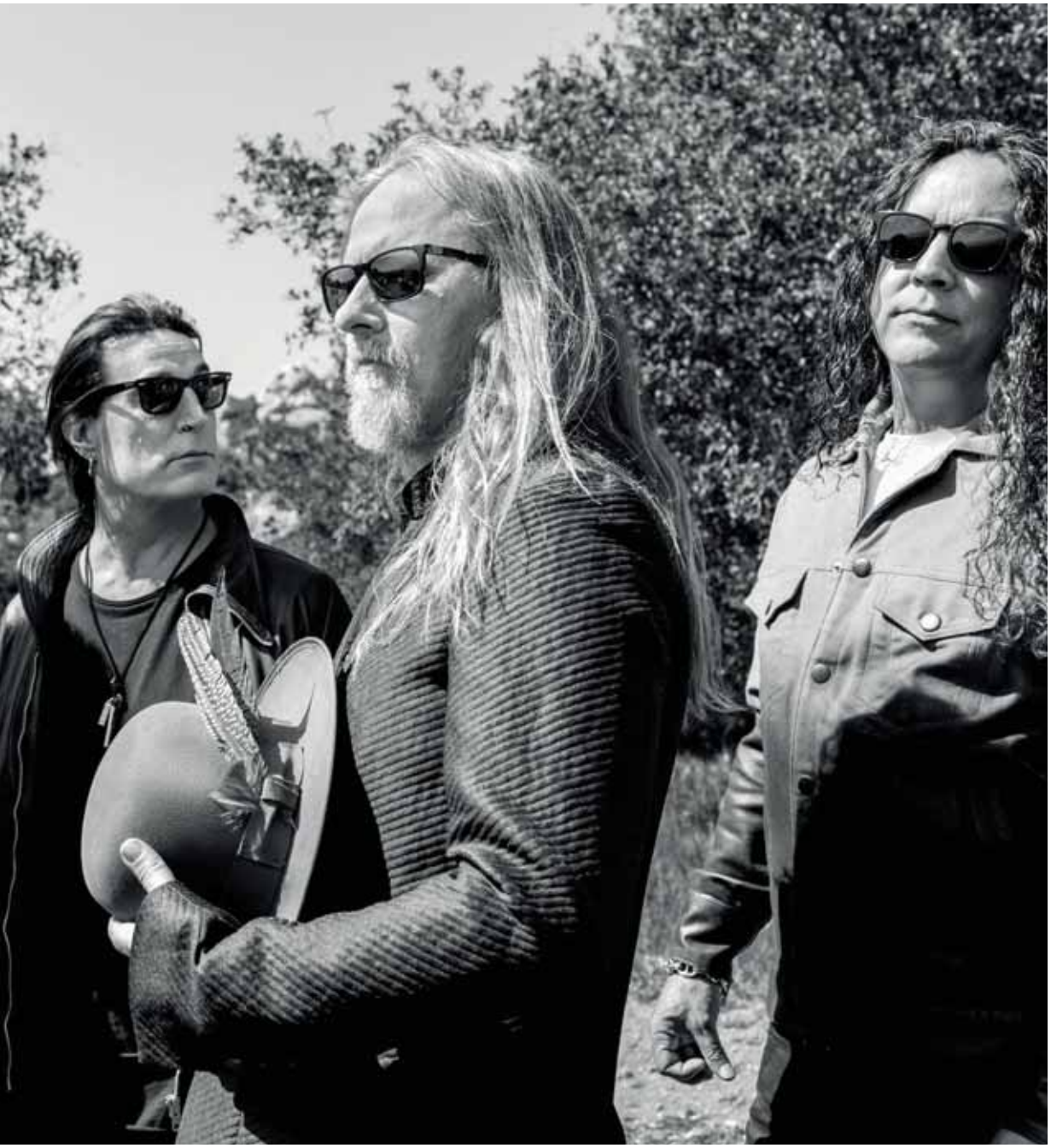
the majestic squall of guitars, it's clear that a fresh new vision is at hand. At its essence, AIC's catalogue is an expansive exploration of the tension between darkness and light: the bludgeoning heft of *Facelift* on one end, *Jar Of Flies* on the other and everything else floating in between, united in a bleak theme of addiction, isolation and despair. With *Rainier Fog*, we see the band adopting the cautiously optimistic perspective of survivors – unsurprising, given their longevity amid a slow parade of death among their friends and peers. The title track serves up a wistful look at the Seattle scene when they first started. With its buzzing riffs and hip-shaking tempos, you can hear more Bowie than Sabbath and its sonic companion, *Never Fade*, is one of the catchiest and, dare it be said, sweetest tracks the band have ever written.

Alice In Chains might have matured, but they sure haven't softened. *So Far Under* – written by and featuring an absolutely filthy solo by William – taps into the gnarled defiance of 1995's *Facelift*, with its sharp, serpentine riffs and vitriolic refrain. On the fragile, more melodic side, *Fly* and *Maybe* both feature sparkling, tightly woven fretwork and absurdly addictive choruses that beg to cranked on car stereos for sunset drives. Ambition abounds, not in volume or ferocity but in a sense of subtlety and restraint. From top to bottom, each track showcases masterful songwriting and inspired lyricism. *Rainier Fog* sees the band breathing new life into their signature sound, with a diverse and deeply emotional collection that history will surely view as a career-defining statement.

8

FOR FANS OF: Led Zeppelin, Mad Season, Soundgarden

JOE DALY



William DuVall

| VOCALS |

HOW DID WORKING WITH GIRAFFE TONGUE ORCHESTRA AFFECT YOUR MUSICAL APPROACH TO THIS RECORD?

"The main thing with GTO was that a lot of the music shifted mood very quickly; there are a lot abrupt tempo shifts and things like that. I viewed it more cinematically and adjusted my writing accordingly. I got all these great musical landscapes and it provided a lot of fertile ground for not only emotional exploration, but also perhaps a bit of commenting or channelling what's going on in the world. That also made that album really fun to do and made those songs really fun to perform. Perhaps we'll get to do more of that at some point. That would be nice."

WHAT WAS IT LIKE RECORDING IN SEATTLE?

"The first show I played with this band was in Seattle at the Moor Theater, 12 years ago. Recording there is a unique experience because you're there for such a long time, you're sort of living there. I lived in Seattle for a while. I'd walk to work every day; sometimes I'd get recognised by people on the street or the local policemen would come up when I'm standing on the corner waiting for the lights to change, and say they enjoyed the show."

***RAINIER FOG* IS QUITE A DENSE RECORD THAT YOU HAVE TO LIVE WITH TO GET THE MOST OUT OF...**

"I've heard that about all three of the records that we've done. There's a lot of sonic information to process; this band throws a lot at you – here's a guitar overdub coming from this direction, here's another thing coming from this direction, here's a five-part harmony at you coming from here and all the vocals are doubled – it's a choir of 20 people coming at you! Hopefully people take the time with it to unlock it."

OLD IRONS *FOUR ESSENTIAL AIC RELEASES*

Facelift

COLUMBIA – 1990

With belters like *We Die Young* and *Bleed The Freak*, AIC's debut resonated powerfully within the rock and metal communities, but once MTV threw *Man In The Box* into heavy rotation, the band stormed into the mainstream and never looked back.

Dirt

COLUMBIA – 1992

With its starkly candid lyrics about addiction, despair and alienation, *Dirt* saw the band convert their emotional low points into muscular, riff-powered anthems like *Would?*, *Them Bones* and the stunning balladry of *Down In A Hole*. One of the 90s' finest records.

Jar Of Flies EP

COLUMBIA – 1994

The first EP to debut at Number One on the Billboard charts, *Jar Of Flies* showcased spectral melodies, textured acoustics and Layne's haunted melancholy on tracks like *Nutshell* and *I Stay Away*. Knowing Layne's sad fate, it's a stunning, if difficult listen.

Black Gives Way To Blue

VIRGIN/EMI – 2009

William's debut saw the band restart as a creative unit. *Check My Brain* remains a staple of AIC's live set but the emotional peak is the title track – Jerry's farewell to Layne, with piano famously contributed by Sir Elton John.

If you don't love Clutch, you're wrong. Simple as that

CLUTCH

Book Of Bad Decisions

WEATHERMAKER MUSIC

Maryland's rock mainstays take the scenic route to greatness

EVERYONE LIKES CLUTCH, don't they? It almost seems unthinkable that anyone could take exception to the music the Maryland quartet have made over the last 27 years, not least because they've always seemed to be having the absolute time of their lives making it. One of very few bands who have survived for several decades without ever dropping a clanger on record or losing their passion for long months on the road, Clutch are currently more popular than ever. With a headline show at London's Brixton Academy looming and this, their 12th studio album, twitching in the starting blocks, their story is one of the most heart-warming in recent rock'n'roll memory: great band make great records, play great shows and remain wonderfully, irresistibly great throughout. Everyone likes Clutch. Why on earth wouldn't you?

Of course, the problem with being almost universally loved is that new albums can be praised to high Heaven regardless of their actual contents. Clutch have never released a bad album per se, but highlights in their catalogue are self-evident: the sound-defining *Clutch* from 1995, the sprawling majesty of 2004's *Blast Tyrant* and *Earth Rocker*, *Metal Hammer*'s 2013 Album Of The Year. On first listen, *Book Of Bad Decisions* feels more akin to 1999's ragged *Jam Room* or the slightly experimental *Robot Hive/Exodus* (2005); it's a diverse, unpredictable record and no one song leaps out as an obvious

scene-stealer. Live with these gloriously wonky and ingenious songs for a little longer, however, and it becomes clear that this is among Clutch's finest work.

The overall sound is rougher and looser than recent albums – you can really hear the band's punk and hardcore influences snarling away – but the songs themselves are endlessly, disarmingly engaging, with Neil Fallon's criminally underrated wordsmithery ensuring that every song has a verbal hook to match the sublime thrust of the riffs and grooves. Trust us, you *will* be shouting "Weaponised funk!" and "Ghoul wrangler!" at each other before the year is out.

Preview singles *How To Shake Hands* and *Gimme The Keys* are slow-burning gems, neither as immediate as something like *X-Ray Vision* from 2015's *Psychic Warfare* album but every bit as memorable after a few spins. In keeping with their love for vintage analogue vibes, a horn section emerges through *In Walks Barbarella*'s fidgeting acid blues to crank up Clutch's soul credentials a notch or six. It's a stunning moment that reaffirms how hard it has always been to pigeonhole a band who owe as much to Bad Brains, ZZ Top and Funkadelic as they do to Black Sabbath.

Best of all, *Emily Dickinson* is a mischievous psychedelic tall tale, built on a stomping pulse and buffeted by lysergic crosswinds. As with everything else here, it could hardly be mistaken for the work of anyone but these four music geeks from Germantown, Maryland, USA... and yet, despite their veteran status, every last second feels fresh, new and unique, even in today's absurdly splintered marketplace.

So, it's business as usual, then. *Book Of Bad Decisions* is another phenomenal piece of work from one of the few bands that we can all agree on. Everyone likes Clutch. Because they're (still) fucking brilliant.

9

FOR FANS OF: Graveyard, Orange Goblin, Captain Beefheart And His Magic Band

DOM LAWSON

ANNISOKAY
Arms
ARISING EMPIRE

German five-piece take another leap up the metalcore ladder

2016's *Devil May Care* saw German post-hardcore/metalcore merchants Annisokay fusing driving rhythms and stylistic diversity, and now with fourth full-length *Arms* the five-piece are out to dispel those lingering 'underdog' connotations. Once again, the band draw influences from across the spectrum and continue to churn out hulking breakdowns and riffs that will lodge themselves deep in your cranium. Soaring choruses alongside clean-cum-harsh vocals collide on lead single *Unaware*, giving this earworm radio-friendly polish while elsewhere sporadic bursts of glitchy synths inject atmosphere harkening back to the excessive heyday of 80s electronica. There's a certain roughness at work, with tracks like *Innocence Was Here* and *End Of The World* sounding decidedly more organic than former material. These guys may not be defying genre conventions, but *Arms* remains a declaration of intent. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Eskimo Callboy, Memphis May Fire, Beartooth

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

ATROCITY
Okkult II
MASSACRE

Long-running German DM crew add more strings to their bow

Death metal may be diversifying into a whole platter of varying styles, but sometimes a good dosage of bludgeoning riffs is just what the doctor ordered, and Atrocity certainly deliver that with their ninth effort, *Okkult II*. Opener *Masters Of Darkness* is a hulking behemoth with its slick riffs and venomous vocals, kickstarting the record in the best possible way. Splashes of orchestral symphonies add a dynamic flair to the intense atmosphere, with the haunting undertones found on *Infernal Sabbath* being a clear highlight, and the guest vocals from Entombed AD's LG Petrov and Marc Grewe (Ex-Morgoth), on *Devil's Covenant* and *Gates To Oblivion* respectively, bolster Atrocity's already explosive firepower. *Okkult II* certainly isn't reinventing the wheel for the genre but rather encapsulates the sheer savage nature of death metal, and will certainly deliver a blunt force trauma. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Entombed AD, Morbid Angel, Necrophobic

JAMES WEAVER

BACKWOODS PAYBACK
Future Slum
SELF-RELEASED

Pennsylvanian power trio get lost on the stoner/grunge highway

With a name like Backwoods Payback, listeners may safely assume they won't be treated to a glitzy showcase of the latest synthwave trends. Unsurprisingly, this beardy Pennsylvania power trio rip the kind of high-resin rockers that sound great with parking lot keg parties and basement bong hits. Though billed by the band as a "lumbering hulk of stoner rock'n'roll", the majority of *Future Slum* taps into the raw, clattering birth of grunge in all its fuzzed-out, mid-tempo glory. Behind a raucous siege of downtuned guitars and the raspy howl of guitarist Mike Cummings, *Lines* could easily be a deep cut from late-80s Soundgarden. Elsewhere, Royal Thunder's Mlny Parsonz balances the heaviness with a soulful guest turn on *Whatever*. Yet while *Future Slum* desperately seeks to fulfil its promise as a heavy-hitting stoner rock epic, its lack of cohesion and any standout, lighter-hoisting belters keep such aspirations in check. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Fu Manchu, Royal Thunder, Tad

JOE DALY

BLACK TUSK
TCBT
SEASON OF MIST

An engine-wrecking riff-fest from the Savannah badlands

They might be one of the more modest members of the Savannah, Georgia mid-00s sludge boom, but Black Tusk have always been one of its most extreme exponents. This sixth album is like an aural representation of a *Mad Max* chase through the desert: wild, violent, scalding hot and like it could all come crashing down around you at any moment. It's certainly not anything groundbreaking for Black Tusk, but when the riff on album closer *Burn The Stars* goes from a rev of the engine to a full-throttled jackhammer it's hard not to feel it deep in your loins. With very few sonic deviations from sludgy poundings, *TCBT* is slightly wearing at 42 minutes long, but if you can keep pace with it then you'll have a riotous good time with Black Tusk once again. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Kylesa, Red Fang, High On Fire

STEPHEN HILL

The Amity Affliction: all downhill from here?

THE AMITY AFFLICTION
Misery
ROADRUNNER

Aussie scene-runners misjudge the metalcore calculus

SOME YEARS AGO, a metal blog published a tongue-in-cheek chart mapping age vs coolness, concluding musicians get cooler until their mid-20s, then it's a rapid decline. By the time the theoretical musician reaches the age at which The Amity Affliction currently find themselves, the 'cool' axis has dropped below zero. And not in the good way.

All of which is to say that when a band operate in a distinctive scene – in this case, melodic metalcore – there comes a point where the audience outgrow the genre, and bands survive by being the best at it, or by being something else entirely. Now on album six, Amity have cocked an eye at the career trajectory of BMTH and opted for the latter. To evoke the title of an album by Limp Bizkit – a band who quickly rose to the top of a genre, and then almost disappeared – results may vary.

It'd be unfair to claim *Misery* as some great departure from what we've come to expect from Amity – an impressive scream/clean blend courtesy of Joel Birch and Ahren Stringer, and hooks wrapped around sharp guitars – but it would also be disingenuous to ignore its cynical attempts to incorporate 'current' elements. The litmus test of whether this is for you comes 59 seconds into *Feels Like I'm Dying*, when a screamed, titular vocal hook meets a squelchy synthesiser riff pilfered from Diplo's recycling bin. While *Misery* has its highlights – opener *Ivy (Doomsday)* is huge – Amity decided some time ago what it is that they want to be. And when you're on a pitch this crowded, you've got to play a lot better than this to stand out. **5**

FOR FANS OF: We Came As Romans, Memphis May Fire, Blessthefall

ROB BARBOUR

THIS MONTH IN METAL *ALBUM MONOLITHS FROM THE VAULT*

TYPE O NEGATIVE *OCTOBER RUST*
ROADRUNNER *SEPTEMBER 1996*

Despite the warm reaction to his band's previous album, *Bloody Kisses*, back in 1996 bassist/frontman Peter Steele was best known to some for an appearance in *Playgirl* magazine. *Hammer*'s reviewer Paul Henderson believed *October Rust* would change all of that. "Quite simply, it puts the band's previous output in the shade," he wrote. Awarding four out of five, he suggested its contents "could quite easily be the soundtrack for a dark, gothic movie: sonically dense, mid-paced throughout, yet grindingly insistent and dripping with a heavy, brooding echo", also factoring in the "marked improvement in terms of songwriting" that had begun with *Bloody Kisses*. The results were "unexpectedly powerful, dynamic and successful".

KEN mode: masochists, do we have a treat in store for you!

KEN MODE

Loved

SEASON OF MIST

Canadian noise merchants go to the point of no return

FOR A BAND with accountants in their midst, you have to wonder just what they thought their ROI was going to be with a band like KEN mode. Think about it for a moment: any band bringing together gruntingly irregular hardcore (Coalesce, Thoughts Of Ionesco), ornery noise-rock (Unsane, Big'n) and the spinier end of 90s DC post-hardcore (Circus Lupus, The Crownhate Ruin, Fugazi at their crankiest) was never going to feather any fucker's nest.

While 2015's ironically titled *Success* might have hinted at more tuneful, Shellac-ish times to come, album number seven reaffirms the belief that the band might in fact be some sort of elaborate tax write-off. Because from the get-go, things just *aren't very nice*. Opening cut *Doesn't Feel Pain Like He Should* starts with a goading eyeball-scrape of feedback and doesn't get much friendlier, overloading early on with erratic guitar scuttles, lung-scraped vocals and moments that sound like a meat cleaver making its way through gristle and into the butcher's block below. By the time that's over, the unseemly lunges of *The Illusion Of Dignity* almost seem like some sort of respite – at least until the elasticated midway riff repeatedly bounces your head off the table and Kathryn Kerr's freeform saxophone begins to ruthlessly prod at whatever's left of your brains. After this? Well, let's just say that 'unrelenting' is the word, with the only quiet patch coming during closer *No Gentle Art* – a slow-to-boil monstrosity that packs more threat into its eight and a half minutes than most bands can muster in a lifetime.

Fans of difficult, intricate music who have not yet engaged will find *Loved* a brilliant place to jump in – for the rest it's another glorious act of self-sabotage in what could conceivably be heavy metal's longest-running act of career suicide.

8

FOR FANS OF: **Keelhaul, American Heritage, Pissed Jeans**

ALEX DELLER

CIRCLES

The Last One

SEASON OF MIST

Artful Australians attempt to bend tech metal into a new shape

Another formidable band from Down Under suggests there's something in the water down there besides great whites. With this only being their second album since their 2010 formation, Circles clearly spend a great deal of time and thought crafting their music. Though the djent hallmarks of juddering staccato riffs on *Dream Sequence* and complicated meanders are all present and correct, there's enormous breadth here, whether it's the groove and crunch of opener *Winter* or the dreamy soundscapes and glorious leads of *Renegade* and *The Messenger*. So while you can get lost in the layers and crescendos that build up throughout *The Last One,* there are also distinct highlights that leap out, ably helped by the cracking pipes of Ben Rechter on the urgent *Breaker*, the immediate chorus and infectious patterns of *Arrival* and the dramatic final salvo of *Alone With Ghosts*. Very much in a similar fashion to countrymen Karnivool, Circles have crafted a modern progressive tapestry with plenty of wider appeal thanks to songwriting nous coupled with their apparent technicality.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Periphery, Tesseract, Karnivool**

ADAM REES

CROSSFAITH

Ex Machina

UNFD

Japan's future-shock rockers lose sight of their destiny

Oh Crossfaith, what happened? Six years ago they were being hailed as one of the best new bands on the planet, but now, three albums later, they still haven't lived up to their potential. The intro track hypes up with sirens blaring, but adrenaline levels fall off a cliff into an album made of wipe-clean plastic. The hooks might get your head moving but nothing reacts with the grey matter inside. For an album comprised of 13 tracks, three feature guest vocalists and there's a cover of Linkin Park's *Faint* (which Did. Not. Need. To. Happen.) – as if the Osaka quintet are running low on ideas. *Daybreak* hits hard with its BFMV-esque riffs and Enter Shikari fans will dig *Freedom*, but for an album set in the future, it's disappointing that Crossfaith still can't live up to their past.

5

FOR FANS OF: **Enter Shikari, Coldrain, Miss May I**

LUKE MORTON

DEAD LETTER CIRCUS

Dead Letter Circus

RISE/BMG

Progressive Aussie rockers keep their ballast intact

On 2015's *Aesthesis* Australia's Dead Letter Circus showed signs of mellowing into their stride, subtly putting aside the robust and pain-stricken crescendos that first caught our attention with the expansive *This Is The Warning*. *Aesthesis* pointed them in the direction of radio-friendly territory where there's little place for pronounced heaviness. With their eponymous album, thank goodness, they haven't done away with the riffs altogether and those twinkling guitar tones, not to mention Kim Benzie's consistently dreamy vocals, the standout drumming of Luke Williams and production by Forrester Savell (Karnivool, Skyharbor), have afforded Dead Letter Circus a recognisable sound. There's no instant hit here but the quality ingredients that give every track a sheen like the hard-hitting euphoria of *Say It Won't Be Long* or the striving Tool-isms of *We Own The Light* are pushing the guys ever closer to the status they deserve.

7

FOR FANS OF: **Karnivool, Tesseract, U2**

HOLLY WRIGHT

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD

BLACK WATER CHEMISTRY

Return To Ashes

SELF-RELEASED

As an energetic, riff-driven exercise, *Return To Ashes* will surely be a thrill for melodic metal fans, but its blind allegiance to the oft-repeated 00s metalcore style makes the EP lose some of its bite. **[6]**

MATT MILLS

CHANDRIAN KILL

Bring Out Your Dead

BAR3

Featuring former Number One Son vocalist Nic Whitmore, this debut EP displays towering, impassioned vocals with scuzzy, low-slung grooves. Borrowing heavily from contemporary bands like Of Mice & Men and scene godfathers Deftones, this EP is a solid platform for CK to develop their own sound. **[6]**

CRAIG HUNTLEY

EYE OF THE DESTROYER

Violent By Design

SELF-RELEASED

With two slabs of prime brutal slam, these New Jersey hooligans have outstripped their previous efforts and morphed into gnarly ones to watch. Huge riffs, Neanderthal beatdowns, guttural threats... yup, that'll do it. **[7]**

DOM LAWSON

DORO
Forever Warriors, Forever United
NUCLEAR BLAST

Germany's metal monarch returns with a full bounty

The German metal queen's passionate fanbase must feel desperately ravenous after a six-year wait for new material. However, few artists have such a profound connection to their fans as Doro. This sumptuous, 25-track double-disc set mitigates the delay, broadly divvying up as an album of hard rockers plus an album of soft ballads. Doro has always decisively nailed both of these approaches, but *Forever...* ramps them up to the nth degree; *Bastardos* is Doro's most fiery headbanger, *It Cuts So Deep* her most tender love song, and *All For Metal* her most infectious, rousing battle chant. There's a terrifically entertaining duet with Amon Amarth's Johan Hegg, a tear-jerking song for Lemmy, and a general focus on precision songwriting that makes every song here a worthy, memorable addition to Doro's long and noble canon. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Judas Priest, Halestorm, Motörhead

CHRIS CHANTLER

DROPOUT KINGS
AudioDope
NAPALM

The nu/rap metal revival finds some new champions

This Arizona-based six-piece plan to bring nu metal back. Inspired by two bandmembers creatively covering *Lying From You*, they quickly gathered a bigger group, released some songs, toured, and never looked back. There have been some shifts along the way, including changing their name from Phoenix Down, but they achieved their goal; this debut delivers Linkin Park-inspired rap-metal with a smooth, modern twist. The band is led by singer Adam Ramey and rapper Eddie Wellz, now with Trevor Norgren on drums, Rob Sebastian on bass, and Staig Flynn and Chucky Guzman tackling guitars. *503* and first single *Nvm* are aggressive and catchy, *20Heads* opens with a pleasingly Beastie Boys vibe, and the title track is engagingly atmospheric. Think squeaky-clean production, samples, chunky breakdowns, and vocals spanning tight snappy rap, radio-friendly hip hop, angry roars, and full-pelt passionate screams highly reminiscent of Chester Bennington. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Hollywood Undead, Linkin Park, Hed PE

NIK YOUNG

EXOCRINE
Molten Giant
UNIQUE LEADER

Deathly French technicians design a brutal new future

There are few things more satisfying than a well-executed technical death metal album. Sonically pristine but spiritually tethered to old-school principles of songcraft and imagination, Exocrine's precise assault marks them as one of their generation's most fascinating bands. Having found the perfect home at Unique Leader, the Frenchmen's sound hasn't changed radically from earlier albums, but *Molten Giant* is their most refined and immersive effort yet. For all their virtuoso wizardry, songs like *Hayato* and *Backdraft* are weirdly accessible, as melody, texture, dynamics and superhuman drumming collide, mutating into something close to futuristic death metal perfection – with a side order of mathcore perversity. In and out in a wonderfully succinct 35 minutes, it's a solid lesson in the power of brevity. Even at their most extravagant, on epic closer *Shape Of New World*, Exocrine's meticulous approach will leave you wanting more. **8**

FOR FANS OF: The Faceless, Ingested, Abysmal Dawn

DOM LAWSON

THE FIVE HUNDRED
Bleed Red
LONGBRANCH

Djent debutants map out some hard-hitting truths

Having honed their sound over two EPs, The Five Hundred are unleashing their brand of djent grooves and galvanised pessimism on their debut full-length. *Bleed Red* is a map for the listener to navigate through the fog of the psyche, touching on depression through singles *Smoke & Mirrors* (*'This is weak, this is deeper than the deepest sea'*) or addiction on *Oblivion* (*'It has a mind of its own, a virus with no home'*). Both are vitally important touchstones to speak up about, especially within our scene. Musically, the sonic map has been expanded with a swing towards deeper melodic vocal lines akin to Light The Torch's Howard Jones, making for an album that gives any black-hearted listener something to give yourself whiplash to. A dynamic, thought-provoking album with a rich melodic landscape to boot. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, Periphery, Meshuggah

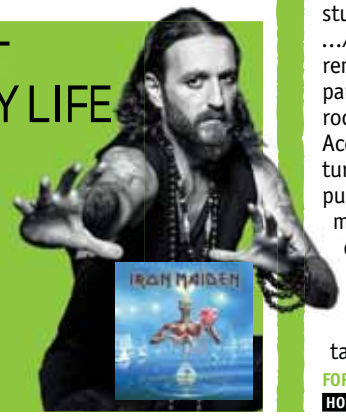
CRAIG HUNTLEY

ALBUM THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

KOBI FARHI
Orphaned Land

IRON MAIDEN
Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son

"It was a life-changing experience. An article about the music of Satan referred to it and I thought it sounded like a great idea. It's magic and it's the album of the religion of metal that I have practised ever since."



Korpiklaani: sobriety doesn't suit them

KORPIKLAANI
Kulkija
NUCLEAR BLAST

Finland's inebriated folk metallers take a turn for the morose

THIS FIDDLE-RIDDLED FINNISH mob, famed for their jaunty odes to vodka, beer and tequila, have cornered the market in party folk metal – and there's no better sight than a throng of jovial festival goers throwing a sweaty jig in the pit. *Kulkija* doesn't disappoint in that respect with a song about moonshine and *Juomamaa*, which translates as 'Drinker's Land', with a simple yet effective message that getting sloshed from day to day can be fun. But this 14-track album, their longest to date, moves beyond the musical version of a week-long bender, revealing their sober side. If you happen to be a dab hand at Finnish, their lyrical vignettes are quite charming. Stories of homesickness and nostalgia interweave with a patchwork of folklore and the snow-capped terrain of Lapland. Ravens, giants, forests and meadows set the scene as Jonne Järvelä describes the conflict of being a wanderer – the album's key theme – and the yearning for his home and his woman.

If the thought of that is enough to sell this record, with the promise of a few 'classic' Korpiklaani jigs then dive right in but – and it's a big but – what they lack in hellraising they do not make up for in emotive subtlety. On *Sillanrakentaja*, Korpiklaani sound like they've stumbled out of a tavern and into a karaoke bar playing *...And Justice For All*. On *Korppikalliota*, Jonne is reminiscent of a grumpy drunk who wants to leave the party early. On the flipside, *Riemu*, with its laddish euro-rock chant, is fit for a low-scoring Eurovision entry. Accordions and fiddles pervade but with the tempo turned down a notch and the more metal elements pushed to the front (Jonne's gruff storytelling, metalised guitars) Korpiklaani's signature cheekiness dissipates. It's a shame that *Kulkija* can't harness more of the energy with which they launched 2015's *Noita*, because that suits them much better, and even the biggest party animals can be taken seriously if they do it well. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Trollfest, Alestorm, Heidevolk

HOLLY WRIGHT

Metal Allegiance: sadly not as special as it should have been

METAL ALLEGIANCE

Volume II: Power Drunk Majesty

NUCLEAR BLAST

Another meeting of minds from the metal messiahs

ROCK AND METAL royalty rarely pass up the opportunity to get onstage with a bunch of friends and jam a few of the genre's classics. But unlike the revelry of a Camp Freddy, Dimebash or Metal Masters, Metal Allegiance took it one step further, delivering a decent album and sculpting a fully fledged touring band while they were at it. Whereas their eponymous 2015 debut seemed very much a smorgasbord of ideas thrown together to complement the styles of the featured vocalists that ranged from a mellow Phil Anselmo to an all-guns-blazing Randy Blythe, *Volume II: Power Drunk Majesty* can boast a far more cohesive feel, with Alex Skolnick's trademark playing and tone helping it to feel like a tribute to Testament's entire discography.

Of course there's an exception to the rule with the clichéd tribal incantation of Max Cavalera's *Voodoo Of The Godsend*, which would normally be a perfectly serviceable Soulfly album track, but elsewhere on the record even the deathlier *The Accuser*, with Trevor Strnad, has a natural connection to the chug of *Bound By Silence* featuring John Bush, the classicisms of *Terminal Illusion*, nailed by Mark Tornillo, and the triumphant two-part title track, given extra gusto by Floor Jansen. Even the Johan Hegg-helmed regality of *King With A Paper Crown* and Rammstein-esque industrial stomp of Troy Sanders' stint, *Liars & Thieves*, have the feel and sound of an established collective, with core members Dave Ellefson, Mike Portnoy and project mastermind Mark Menghi laying down the groundwork of familiar grooves and galloping tempo. Yes the lyrics are often ropey, and given the masterpieces that the assembled talents have contributed, this is a merely a solid spin that's miles off being the sum of its parts. However, that's probably missing the point of this celebration of metal's community spirit and span of idiosyncratic forms.

6

FOR FANS OF: Testament, Roadrunner United, Teenage Time Killers

ADAM REES

JESUS PIECE

Only Self

SOUTHERN LORD

Pennsylvanian mob mix brains and brawn to thrilling effect

This Pennsylvania-based metallic hardcore group formed in 2015 and now have a demo, EP, split seven-inch and some impressive tour slots under their belt. This first full-length, complete with particularly rich opening track, *Lucid*, is a comfortingly familiar but admirably sophisticated step forward. *Only Self* is heavy but carefully crafted with ferocious, angular riffage, atmospheric samples, enraged roars and interesting shifts in tempo. Their vocals are utterly brutal, scathing and raspy and they're not afraid to play with dramatic pauses either. *In The Silence* shows a cool, distinctive side to their aggression, *Neuroprison* shows their hand at a faster-paced track and the two instrumental closing tracks show restraint and a dark twist to their sound. This is fierce, intelligent hardcore that drops in satisfying breakdowns, butch grooves and eerie soundscapes as needed. It's a stellar first effort from an uncompromising and rightly confident-sounding band.

8

FOR FANS OF: Vein, Nails, Disembodied

NIK YOUNG

KRAKOW

Minus

KARISMA

Intriguing explorations from Bergen's atmospheric metallers

Norwegians Krakow's initially straightforward approach rapidly proves beguiling as you delve deeper into *Minus* – the product of two albums' worth of material distilled into one. The result is as considered as you might expect given it's only their fourth LP in 13 years. *Black Wandering Sun* makes for a rocking intro, in no small part thanks to Motörhead guitarist Phil Campbell's guest solo, cutting through stampeding riffs as atonally harmonised vocals ascend. The deeper you go, the more nuanced the record becomes, the eerie electro-buzz of *The Stranger* twisting and turning through chilling reverb, immolated in the glowering furnace of persistently concussive guitars that is *From Fire, From Stone*. Culminating in the esoterically meditative explorations of *Tidlaus*, which develops into something primal and rousingly anthemic, *Minus* resonates with the wisdom and power of the ancients – an emotionally and intellectually nourishing experience.

8

FOR FANS OF: Audrey Horne, Ulver, Cult Of Luna

TOM O'BOYLE

LEECHED

You Took The Sun When You Left

PROSTHETIC

Miserable Mancunians make an almighty, sludgy racket

Sometimes no fun at all can be hugely enjoyable. Take this debut album from Manchester-based trio Leeched; it's filled with songs titles like *Raised By Lead* and *A Mouth Full Of Dirt*, it's as nihilistic as Eyehategod, as bleak as Neurosis on a rainy Monday morning and is predominately made up of riffs and guttural howling that's heavier than having a hippo drive a steamroller over your foot. But the sludgy, ugly, seething, pitch-black hardcore that makes up *You Took The Sun When You Left* will make anyone who loves savagely loathsome music grin from ear to ear all the way through its 11 tracks. The way that Leeched delight in punishing the listener, as evidenced by *Born In Sand*'s climax of feedback-drenched primal screams, is a gruesome joy. A piece of wonderful self-flagellation.

8

FOR FANS OF: Breach, Helpless, All Pigs Must Die

STEPHEN HILL

SMALL MERCIES

THE NEW BLOOD

HADAL MAW

Charlatan

SELF-RELEASED

Razor-sharp technical riffs, hulking instrumental passages and colossal dissonant tones collide in a sonic maelstrom as Hadal Maw's latest slab of progressive death metal sits comfortably between Meshuggah and Obscura and is a mighty beast indeed. **[8]**

JAMES WEAVER

LOWER AUTOMATION

Shoebox Companion

SELF-RELEASED

With touches of everyone from The Mars Volta to Yourcodenameis:milo to The Blood Brothers, *Shoebox Companion* is 14 minutes of excellent math-punk, all beautifully evocative of the genre's golden age. **[7]**

STEPHEN HILL

TAKEN BY THE TIDE

Revenge

SELF-RELEASED

Dredging up all the nastiest elements of tech metal, *Revenge* is planned with sinister care and delivered with expert precision, yet the key achievement of the band's third EP is producing an ugly wall of wrath on *Moloch*. **[6]**

ADAM REES

LORD OF THE LOST
Thornstar
NAPALM

Wonderful mythic nonsense from symphonic Germans

It takes some pomposity to create a massive concept album around a doomed high civilisation, but that's what Lord Of The Lost have done. They develop the story of the Pangaeians, who supposedly existed tens of thousands of years ago, and in doing so, the Germans have come up with an enticing, elegant double album, full of orchestrally evocative music. In many respects, this is something akin to what Therion have done recently with *Beloved Antichrist*. This should be heard in one swoop all the way through to get the full flavour of what's been achieved, which is thunderous symphonic metal, but there are outstanding tracks, such as *Morgana* and *Lily Of The Vale*. A mighty work of pompous artistry. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Nightwish, Queensrÿche, Therion

MALCOLM DOME

MANES
Slow Motion Death Sequence
DEBEMUR MORTI

Former black metallers lack purpose to their outward push

Making a directional jump straight from orthodox, second-wave BM into ambient electronica, break-beats and jazz rock grandstanding didn't sit too well with Manes' fans back in 2003. And yet braving such bold evolution, alongside the likes of Ulver, put them ahead of the game, as visionaries in a field since proven full of evolutionary potential. Fifth album *Slow Motion Death Sequence* continues in their experimental vein. The gracious melancholy of *Endetidstegn*, the electro pulse of *Scion* and the rifforama of *Chemical Heritage* make for a subdued opening, but the progressive venom of *Poison Enough For Everyone* is a mid-point highlight. *Building The Ship Of Theseus* feels stifled, the entire record fraught with existential angst begging for cathartic release. While Manes may appease those with a penchant for experimentation for experimentation's sake, their ever-present mid-tempo, Euro-rock vibe is sorely lacking in charisma. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Anathema, Ulver, Arcturus

TOM O'BOYLE

MOTOROWL
Atlas
CENTURY MEDIA

Germany's psychedelic doom crew ratchet up the prog levels

Their name may be daft but there is nothing wrong with Motorowl. Quite the opposite; with this conceptually based second album, the Germans concoct a classy, appealing and thoughtful mix of hard rock, meat'n'potatoes metal, doom-flavoured ingredients and good ol' fashioned psychedelia. Back in 2016 Motorowl received wide underground praise for their debut, *Om Generator*, but with this follow-up they fly the nest. Daniel Detlev's synthesisers are every bit as crucial as the guitars, enriching the quintet's sound. Reflecting the album's source of inspiration of Atlas – the character from Greek mythology destined to hold up the sky for all eternity – these are long, weighty and often intricate tunes, often involving multiple changes of both tempo and key. Best of all is swansong *Norma Jean*, which, over nine hypnotic minutes, lurches between howling, detuned guitar, swirling keys and outright funereal dirge – the soundtrack to an apocalyptic nightmare. *Atlas* could put its creators on the map. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Royal Thunder, Baroness, Opeth

DAVE LING

OMNIUM GATHERUM
The Burning Cold
CENTURY MEDIA

Finland's veteran melodic metallers continue to evolve

Finnish six-piece Omnium Gatherum have spent 22 years engaged in the juggling of two contradictory forces: melody and heaviness. As their lone thread of continuity, guitarist Markus Vanhala loves nothing more than teaming guttural growls with a polished, glistening death metal foundation. Recent Omnium Gatherum albums have introduced a slightly progressive edge, a process of evolution continued by this eighth release. Although Jukka Pelkonen does his best to make its lyrics sound like a gargling contest between two laryngitis-stricken grizzly bears, the album grapples with such issues as historical tragedies and the complexities of the human condition. Omnium Gatherum think big, of that there's no doubt, and a typically inventive sound mix from Dan Swanö refracts and enhances a rainbow of beauty, power and brutality. The decision to trim the songs and keep them punchier only emphasises their impact. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Insomnium, Mors Principium Est, Dark Tranquillity

DAVE LING

LAST ALBUM BOUGHT

SHAGRATH
Dimmu Borgir

TRIBULATION
Down Below

"When Tribulation released the first single it really grabbed my attention. I was really excited about the release and then I heard the second song, *Nightbound*, and it was totally amazing, too. It's an album that I've been playing a lot lately."

Skyharbor: a treat for the senses

SKYHARBOR
Sunshine Dust
EONE

Continent-spanning progressive metallers open up a new front

SKYHARBOR'S HUMBLE ROOTS as guitarist Keshav Dhar's DIY solo project now seem many light years away. Over two albums, the latter being 2014's sumptuous and stunning *Guiding Lights*, the Indian/American progressive metallers have blossomed into something far more cinematic, sonically capable of touching far-reaching galaxies.

In 2015, when then-vocalist Daniel Tompkins announced he was quitting Skyharbor having rejoined Tesseract the year before, it felt like the rug was being pulled from under the band's feet just as they were hitting their stride. However, in new frontman Eric Emery, the band have unearthed a rare gem: a singer able to put his own spin on Dan's emotive highs without ever sounding like a copycat. Third album *Sunshine Dust* arrives now after a four-year wait although some of the tracks here, like the sublime *Out Of Time*, were released as far back as 2015, while the seductive *Synthetic Hands* is a reworking of a 2016 track, previously released under the title *Chemical Hands*. The long delay seems to have worked in the band's favour, though, allowing time for their new line-up, including new drummer Aditya Ashok, to settle and their new songwriting talents to coalesce. Consequently, *Sunshine Dust* boasts a collection of songs as instantaneous and memorable as they are engaging. From the moment *Dim* explodes in a blinding glare of twinkling lights, luxuriant colours and shimmering soundscapes, it's clear this was always intended to be a sensory experience. As such, *Ethos* is the perfect balance between Eric's starry melodies, poppy undertones and Keshav's soaring melodic metal. Despite a general weightlessness that glides throughout each of the tracks, there are also nightmarish shades amongst the crimson skies of *Dissent* and *Menace* where harsh screams, crunching riffs and an earworm chorus converge with ease. *Sunshine Dust* continues Skyharbor's run of dependably great albums. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Tesseract, Karnivool, Periphery

DANNII LEIVERS

Sabbat: a beacon for the UK thrash scene

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Contract In Blood: A History Of UK Thrash Metal
CHERRY RED

A near-exhaustive survey of Blighty's unsung speed-freaks

VETERAN BRITISH METALHEADS might remember grumbling that the UK wasn't pulling its weight during the 1980s thrash explosion. After Judas Priest, Motörhead, UK punk and NWOBHM so profoundly inspired the US and European thrash scenes, we Brits seemed content to put our feet up for a 20-year tea break, so a five-disc, 80-song boxset of UK thrash could sound like a terrifying endurance test. However, at some point during this marathon endeavour you're blown away by how many diamonds have been rescued from the rough by noted musician and writer Ian Glasper – although Ian's own eminently worthy bands, Decadence Within and Stampin' Ground, are alas nowhere to be found. They're not the only glaring omissions; keenly felt is the absence of Xentrix, whose song *No Compromise* is arguably Britain's greatest thrash anthem. Xentrix were one of the UK bands groomed for stardom because their music approximated the lucrative Bay Area sound, but apart from Slammer's admittedly killer *Tenement Zone*, there's a surprising lack of wannabe-Americanisms. Many bands reflect the character of their homeland; not just the wacky humour of Lawnmower Deth and Metal Duck, nor the poverty-stricken, two-fingers-in-the-air racket of Anihilated and Hellbastard, but also the touches of arch eccentricity enlivening even the most obscure cuts by long-forgotten foot-soldiers like Deathwish, Xyster, Decimator and Warpspeed.

But although it's a nostalgic hoot revisiting the scene's genuine legends (Venom, Sabbat, Onslaught) alongside the budget-lager also-rans (Drunken State, Tortoise Corpse, Zeitgeist), it's the post-millennial thrash revivalists like Evile, SSS, Gama Bomb and Savage Messiah who up-ratchet the power, passion and professionalism, providing a neat counterpoint to hoarier museum pieces. The geographical track sequencing doesn't really make much sense, but there is so much joy to discover, including several songs never before pressed to CD, now hearteningly saved from the slow deterioration of demo tape ribbon.

8

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Kreator, Metallica

CHRIS CHANTLER

OUR MIRAGE
Lifeline
ARISING EMPIRE

German post-hardcore crew bring no oil for their spark

The most memorable track and creative highpoint of Our Mirage's new album barely features the band at all. A young man talking about manic depression set to a gentle-but-stirring soundbed, *Honesty* is an ambitious move that seeks to tie a narrative thread through the album's lyrical content and, despite sounding trite on paper, it really works. It's a real pity, then, that the rest of the tracks on *Lifeline* are so by-the-numbers. Melodic, almost-screamed vocals? Check. Clicky, triggered bass drum? Of course. Choppy, processed guitars? All present and correct. While it's playing, *Lifeline* is a perfectly passable album that could have been made by any band on the Vans Warped Tour circa 2014 but with a dearth of decent riffs and few memorable choruses, there's little here to draw you back for more.

5

FOR FANS OF: Northlane, Underoath, The Amity Affliction

ROB BARBOUR

PAGAN
Black Wash
HASSLE

Melbourne debutants make a vivid, punk rock splash

Black Wash is the official debut from this rock'n'rollin' quartet, and suffice to say these Aussies know how to craft blackened riff-addled tunes of the heaviest order. Focusing on societal ills and the tribulations life throws up, the Pagan manifesto ultimately revolves around each bandmember's struggle and escape from proverbial hell through unbridled sonic unity. All 11 "spells" are awash with a sound that is as brutal as it is beautifully delicate. Against a backdrop of monolithic fury and meticulous songcraft, vocalist Nikki Brumen deftly weaves between tortured howls and searing emotion. Homage is lovingly paid to their punk rock roots (*The Greatest Love Songs*) while the neon-soaked stomp of *Year Of The Dog* and rebellious back-alley jam *Silver* are to be celebrated. It's a promising insight into a band who will no doubt make for a euphoric live experience.

8

FOR FANS OF: Marmozets, Turbonegro, Refused

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

THE RARE BREED
Looking For Today
RIPPLE

Psychedelic West Coast rockers get stuck in the past

Within the increasingly clustered labyrinths of 70s revivalism, bands generally skew toward one of two stylistic outlooks: either the melodic, pop-centered effervescence of the flower power generation or the sinister, fuzzed-out doom of rock's darker passages. LA's The Rare Breed fall squarely into the latter. Their seven-track debut channels an authentic slice of head-bobbing psychedelia, Nixon-era paranoia and eyeball-rattling bad acid trips. *Looking For Today* isn't about the individual songs as much as it is about tapping into that claustrophobic 70s doom metal vibe. Druggy riffs, chugging tempos and sharp, freewheeling solos abound on tracks like *Mountain Of Dreams* and *Echo From The Sun*. The pitfall into which this album falls, however, is that in reverentially conjuring a certain sound, the individual tracks bleed together into a tepid brew of familiar-sounding riffs and Ozzy-inspired vocals. *Looking For Today* serves up its fair share of dashboard-tapping moments but the problem is that you've heard it all before.

6

FOR FANS OF: Uncle Acid & The Deadbeats, Blood Ceremony, Church Of Misery

JOE DALY

WORLD SERVICE
GLOBAL METAL

BURIAL INVOCATION
ABIOGENESIS
DARK DESCENT

If Burial Invocation spear-headed the rise of the Turkish death metal movement, their first proper full-length fails to recapture that early malevolent vibe. *Abiogenesis* is a victim of the *…And Justice For All* syndrome with its pile of overblown riffs. **[5]**

OLIVIER BADIN

DIVIDING THE ELEMENT
Dividing The Element
SELF-RELEASED

This Zimbabwean quartet deal in muscular, Afro-metal grooves, stirring melodies and flashes of old-school flair. It's a disarmingly fresh hybrid, all sung in the band's native Shona, and Soulfly fans will love it. **[7]**

DOM LAWSON

SAHON
Chanting For The Fallen
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY ASIA

Aside from a handful of forgettable moments, South Korean thrashers Sahon deliver an aggressive bout of heaviness with *Chanting For The Fallen* and will whet the appetites of fans of Kreator, Sodom and Deströyer 666. **[7]**

JAMES WEAVER

SULACO
The Prize
TRANSLATION LOSS

New York's sludgy technicians fail to tighten the screw

On paper, *The Prize* sounds like it should be an intense experience. The first Sulaco release in seven years, it sees the sludgy grindcore stalwarts return in a guitar-driven and raucous display. However, even with its miniscule running time of 27 minutes, the mini-LP commits the cardinal sin of simply being boring to endure. Despite its continuous high energy, *The Prize* irreparably buckles under the throes of excessive repetition and poor production. Tracks like *Disguise* and *The Road* feel unnecessarily bloated, artificially inflated by riffs that constantly recur ad nauseam. The production only hammers home the tedium, with the dry clickety-clack of the percussion and the absence of any audible bass guitar purveying an aura of soullessness. With improved sound quality and more succinct songwriting, *The Prize* may have been a gem, but as is, it's a rather unengaging slog. **4**

FOR FANS OF: Napalm Death, High On Fire, Dead Cross

MATT MILLS

TIME, THE VALUATOR
How Fleeting, How Fragile
LONGBRANCH

German quartet aim for the djent sweet spot

Straddling the divisive styles of djent and early-00s emo, Germans Time, The Valuator are certainly not going to be everyone's bag, not least when Phil Bayer's high-pitched vocals extend beyond their range or when some blunt rapping is employed on *Terminus* and *The Violent Sound*. But when everything clicks this debut album can be alluring. There's plenty of interesting interplay between the acrobatic guitars and punchy rhythm section, while the likes of *Fugitive* and *Elusive Reasons* mix this with a real ear for melody that rivals what Periphery have achieved on recent releases. While the contrast between riffs and sickly sweet pop hooks does jar on *How Fleeting* and even repeats the same tune on *When I Meet Death*, the dramatic keys of *Heritage* and grittier nature of *In Control* add a sense of anticipation for what comes next. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Periphery, Good Tiger, Skyharbor

ADAM REES

ULTRA-VIOLENCE
Operation Misdirection
CANDLELIGHT

Blistering Italian thrashers take a bizarre detour

With Power Trip and Havok having raised the bar for the newer school of thrash bands quite considerably over the last couple of years, there is a chance that the third album from Italian quartet Ultra-Violence would have made little dent in our scene. Put simply, *Operation Misdirection* is a pretty decent new breed of old-school thrash record, with a nice dollop of popping bass to go along with its Megadeth-heavy technical riffing – *Nomophobia* being probably the best example of Ultra-Violence getting it really right. But then, halfway through the record, the band drop a cover of Dire Straits' classic *Money For Nothing* that's so ludicrous and absurd an idea that you just have to take a second to sit back and admire their balls. It's such a moment of genius lunacy that it steals the whole album, making *Operation Misdirection* something that you need to hear at least once. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Havok, Megadeth, Dire Straits

STEPHEN HILL

VAN CANTO
Trust In Rust
NAPALM

Germany's a cappella metallers introduce a seventh son

They say about fetishes that if you can think of it, it probably exists. Similarly, somewhere out there people are getting their jollies to albums' worth of a cappella metal. It's intensely difficult to listen to Van Canto's seventh(!) album without smirking at the *'rumma-numma-num's* on opener *Back In The Lead* as new addition Hagen Hirschmann belts out *'Five singers grew to six plus one'* (clearly, 'seven' didn't have the rhythmical punch) or guffawing at the unintentional innuendo of *Javelin*, but if Van Canto were that niche they wouldn't be churning out albums or growing to six-plus-one members. Fair play that they roped in original Halloween dude Kai Hansen on a galloping cover of *Ride The Sky*, and Hagen's credible appropriation of Brian Johnson on *Hells Bells* is worthy of a listen, but you might want to do it in private. **5**

FOR FANS OF: Sabaton, The Flying Pickets, The Swingle Singers

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Vôdûn: pure magic

VÔDÛN
Ascend
NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Voodoo rock with a kaleidoscopic vision

IT WOULD BE easy to take exception to Vôdûn. On paper, they are a hipster's dream: unconventional, multi-racial and not quite heavy enough to upset Royal Blood fans. In reality, their second album is so preposterously exciting and unremittingly inventive that even the crushing likelihood that the band will one day end up on *Later... With Jools Holland* seems a bitter pill worth swallowing. Ultimately, *Ascend* hits the target because it so obviously comes from a place of sincerity, even while accruing cool points along the way. Vocalist Chantal Brown is an irresistible force of nature, of course, her incensed, soulful delivery covering an insane spread of emotional colour while The Marassa's primal but refined riffs and drummer Ogoun's octopoid clatter propel the whole thing breathlessly along.

But it's the songs themselves that will linger long in the memory after the briefest of listens. Where Vôdûn's *Possession* debut felt a little rushed and naïve, *Ascend* simply soars. Something like *Started From* could have been an unremarkable hard rock song in less capable hands, but thanks to an inspired arrangement, several bursts of euphoric gospel choir and a dose of pointedly political spoken word, it feels more like a condensed hippie musical than a four-minute anthem. Similarly, the almost comically energetic *Providence Of Ancestors* is both an exercise in pure doom metal abandon and a wild fuzz-punk ritual, replete with mad percussion and a dash of syncopated funk. Ogoun's *Flight* is a Sabbath-meets-Fela Kuti cut'n'shut that should have Goat and Here Lies Man fans drooling, while the title track gets its Led Zep voodoo vibe on with dizzying panache. Barely a track goes by without some perverse, unexpected embellishment, but Vôdûn's mastery of the groove is absolute and their eccentricity never gets in the way of a massive riff. Let's claim them for our own before someone else nicks them. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Black Sabbath, Goat, The Atomic Bitchwax

DOM LAWSON

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Sikth's *Death Of A Dead Day* tracks predictably go down a storm

Sleep Token: anonymous awesomeness

UK TECH-FEST 2018

NEWARK SHOWGROUND, NEWARK-ON-TRENT

Setlist

SIKTH

Philistine Philosophies
The Aura
Hold My Finger
Pussyfoot
Skies Of Millennium Night
Flogging The Horses
Way Beyond The Fond Old River
Summer Rain
Part of The Friction
When The Moments Gone
Sanguine Seas
Bland Street Bloom

Martyr Defiled go out with a multitude of headbangs

Bleed From Within bring the party

JAKE OWENS

Betraying The Martyrs get everyone's feet stomping

Employed To Serve: you'd be screaming, too, wearing windbreakers in this heat...

Nottinghamshire's feast of fret-botherers brings the rough and the smooth

THURSDAY

Now an established, distinctive entry in the UK metal calendar, Tech-Fest has flourished with its strong ethos that's only enhanced by the broad scope it's given rise to. By the time **TAKEN BY THE TIDE [7]** and **RAVENFACE [8]** have made their respective offerings of blackened, eight-string vitriol and searing metalcore, the early birds have already survived a small tornado and endured scorching temperatures. It's enough to prompt an exodus to the bar, but **HEART OF A COWARD**'s **[8]** dizzying slalom of colossal riffery and ferocity, alongside new frontman Kaan Tasan's effortless range, halts everyone in their tracks.

FRIDAY

Parisians **THE DALI THUNDERING CONCEPT [8]** open the second, Winspear stage on the first full day, veering seamlessly between mind-bending mathcore, syncopated beats and jazzy, sax-led arrangements. Sinister ambience and pummelling grooves lurk in the ravaged heart of **MISCREANT [7]** on the main, Waghorn Guitar stage, and that infectious atmosphere lingers as **FROM SORROW TO SERENITY [8]** step up, invigorating the sea of raucous, sweaty fans while tearing through beefed-up cuts like *Forsaken*. It takes a special band to reduce tech connoisseurs to swooning heaps, but **VOLA**'s **[8]** evocative genre-bending places them at the forefront of modern prog. **UNPROCESSED [8]** cement their position within the progressive spectrum with gargantuan riffs, bursts of electronica and immersive melodies. It takes approximately 60 seconds for Scottish brutalisers **BLEED FROM WITHIN [7]** to bring the party and unbridled sonic destruction to life. A new era has arrived and its reverberating around the main stage. **VOYAGER [7]** are all smiles before pulling out a musical arsenal chock-full of richly textured polyrhythms, expansive grooves and fret-based gymnastics. Souls are transported to otherworldly dimensions as **THE CONTORTIONIST [8]** take us on a brooding yet epic journey. They may be without guitarist Pin tonight, but London metal heavyweights and main stage headliners **SIKTH [8]** don't miss a beat as they unleash their riddles of humanity upon this baying throng. Beautifully bizarre jams *Pussyfoot* and *Skies Of Millennium Night* are embraced in all their twisted glory, but the loudest cheers are reserved for material from 2006's seminal *Death Of A Dead Day*.

SATURDAY

VALIS ABLAZE [8] make an enthralling start to another hot day as their sumptuous melodies are juxtaposed by growling basslines and atmospheric synths. On the main stage, **THE FIVE HUNDRED [8]** continue to be unmissable live with new tracks *Bleed Red* and *Oblivion* harnessing equal measures of bounce and aggression. Fusing intricate prog with anthemic metalcore, rising tech-upstarts **ARCAEON [7]** look certain to be catapulted into the mainstream. Kudos to them and polyrhythmic crushers **THE VOYNICH CODE [7]**, who are going head-to-head with the England World Cup match that's being screened in the merch area. **NEXILVA [8]** are back with a new vocalist and a renewed, raging tech-death ferocity. Striking a balance between snarling catharsis and immersive elegance, **DAMNED SPRING FRAGANTIA [7]** know how to push the innovative-tech loving buttons. Eyes are wiped and fists thrown toward the main stage as **MARTYR DEFILED [9]** bid a ferocious farewell to Tech-Fest amid a cacophony of gut-wrenching screams, thunderous riffs and crushing dissonance. Such rabid intensity is hard to follow so it's a good job Warsaw experimentalists **TIDES FROM NEBULA [7]** know how to deliver the gift of shapeshifting compositions. **INGESTED**'s **[8]** only letdowns tonight are a muddy sound and the fact that the crowd need to be persuaded to move, but the death metallers' performance is so tight and heavy that they eventually win masses over, and even get a wall of death going in spite of the heat. Headliners **THE ACACIA STRAIN [9]** demonstrate exactly why they're regarded as one the finest purveyors of nihilistic deathcore with a set capable of peeling the enamel from your teeth. Vincent Bennett stalks the stage spitting vitriol and inciting the hordes. The intertwining of dissonant dirge-like guitar droning and hardcore-spliced riffs ensure the night ends in disturbing style.

SIKTH UNLEASH THEIR RIDDLES OF HUMANITY ON A BAYING THRONG

SUNDAY

It's barely midday and brains are leaking out of ears due to the filth-encrusted hardcore of **LEECHED [8]**. Death via sonic bludgeoning suddenly seems worthwhile. **CONJURER [8]** have been surfing on a tsunami of hype thanks to their visceral debut, *Mire*. Doom-laden atmospherics and moody chord progressions collide with guttural growls – and the crowd are swept along with the startling technical intricacies. The sun may be scorching the earth, but the second stage remains shrouded in the blackened gloom of Glasgow's **LOTUS EATER [8]**, who devastate via those deep, djent-fuelled grooves. Whereas **BLOODSHOT DAWN [7]** deal in straightforward brutality, **CREPITATION**'s **[7]** batshit electronic noise-cum-deathgrind confuses as much as it converts onlookers. For anyone feeling bereft after TDEP's demise, German instrumentalists **THE HIRSCH EFFEKT**'s **[8]** art-math perfection may fill that hole in your soul as the trio's exquisite musicianship puts them on course for band of the day. **LOATHE [8]** hurtle out of the gate amid a host of nightmarish soundscapes, rousing choruses and rhythmic complexities. It's the worst-kept secret ever, but the sheer reverence surrounding the anonymous enigma known as **SLEEP TOKEN [9]** is well-founded as we bear witness to 'Ritual VIII' and 30 minutes of jaw-dropping emotion. **EMPLOYED TO SERVE [8]** immediately lay waste to the main stage, sounding more energetic and violent than most of the other bands here. Kudos, too, for wearing windbreakers while playing in a baking-hot metal shed. **BETRAYING THE MARTYRS' [8]** call-to-arms metalcore is the epitome of a pit-starter. Blastbeats and beatdowns are tempered by clean vocals and consistent grooves, while frontman Aaron Matts encourages a rabid crowd to open countless walls of death during *(Dis)Connected* and the anthemic earworm *Resilient*. This Paris wrecking crew continue to stand strong.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN/JAKE OWENS

Ozzy's voice may be hit and miss, but his setlist is all hits

Abbath shrieks at the sudden appearance of the sun

Kvelertak's Erlend Hjelvik prepares to take flight

TONS OF ROCK

FREDRIKSTEN FORTRESS, HALDEN

Ozzy, Alice In Chains and At The Gates earn their keep in Norway

WEDNESDAY

A two-hour ride from Oslo through the beautiful wooded hills of southern Norway, the Fredriksten fortress in Halden has been of crucial strategic importance since the 1640s. With old enemies Sweden to the east, west and south, it has withstood heavy metal bombardment for 400 years, but when *Hammer* arrives at the garrison drill square containing the Tons Of Rock main stage, dear old Blighty is doing the honours. Alas, Girlschool are just leaving the stage – and leaving us all wondering why a pioneering band with a 40-year pedigree are doing a day-one 3pm warm-up. **EXODUS [7]** blast into their joyous pummelling thrash, drummer Tom Hunting beating his chest like Metal Tarzan as Steve 'Zetro' Souza whips up a circlepit, bawling at two guys in banana costumes: "You motherfuckers in the bananas, can we rely on you?"

Opeth deliver a muted set

The Swedish re-invasion of Norway begins in earnest with **ARCH ENEMY [8]**, a festival supergroup with impeccable credentials. Mike Amott looks tired, but few notice; all eyes are mesmerised by charismatic frontwoman Alissa White-Gluz. Also mesmerising but in a different way, Norway natives **WARDRUNA [8]** stalk onstage with their towering birchbark lur-horns, catapulting a euphoric audience back to the Bronze Age with their spell-binding Viking mood music.

OZZY OSBOURNE [7] has been a superstar virtually *since* the Bronze Age, and occasionally it shows; trotting onstage to *Bark At The Moon*, the Ozzman hits more right notes than anyone's expecting, but not so many that anyone thinks he's faking it. Presumably he grabs a lengthy nap during Zakk Wylde's preposterous soloing, but it's a two-hour set of towering classics, and all 10,000 punters squeezed into these stone battlements audibly adore him.

THURSDAY

Good vibes don't last long into day two, as a deluge of rain buckets down on the fortress during **EPICA**'s **[7]** set, the Dutch sextet gamely trying to rally a thinning number of ponchoed diehards to their heavenly sympho-goth bombast. Weather reports suggest that rain is set to lash down into the night, but when **AT THE GATES [8]** commence their neck-snapping death grooves the deluge turns to drizzle, and when the marauding Swedes pull out *Blinded By Fear*, ponchos are coming off. **ABBATH [7]** is up next, and as the ex-Immortal legend stalks lobster-like across the stage, he must feel grimly nonplussed; just as he launches into his ice-cold jet-black metal, clouds roll back and sunshine floods the fortress. Mixing Immortal classics with new solo material, it's inherently satisfying, although the mid-tempo plod gets a little monotonous.

Alice In Chains stun with a set of classics

Arch Enemy: a most welcome Swedish invasion

There's always time for a quick 'pit

KEVIN NIXON

At the Tentstage, classy Swede rockers **WITCHCRAFT [9]** run through a tight set of evenly chosen fan favourites: no fuss, no frills, just good musicians lost in music. Much like **ALICE IN CHAINS [8]** – the only main stagers without a backdrop – whose sludgy low-end is offset by William DuVall's soulful pipes on a savvy setlist wisely skewed towards pre-1995 material. As the classic *Rooster* brings the show to a shuddering emotional climax, we're off back to the Tentstage to get floored by an absolutely pulverising **MARDUK [9]** set, the Swedish black metal brutes dropping jaws with their ferocity and precision, undimmed for nearly 30 years. Alice In Chains were billed as headliners, but we all know it's really **W.A.S.P. [7]**. The LA hellions were built for a big stage, and Blackie Lawless's rabble-rousing charisma and raucous screams fill the fortress with a setlist that sadly has too many key omissions to be hailed a complete triumph.

FRIDAY

After a guided tour of the fortress – a chance to enjoy stunning panoramic views while soaking up tales from Norwegian military history – **SOULFLY [5]** can't help ending up a damp squib. One-note riffs and remedial bellowing aren't best-suited to Fredriksten's ambience. **OPETH [7]** are a far better fit, the Swedes casually unloosing a compact (i.e.: too short) best-of (post-2000) set. The performance is perhaps a little muted and listless, but the songs stand tall, and the closing riff of *Deliverance* sets us off merrily down the hill to the Tentstage, to follow Mikael's advice and witness the coming of **COVEN [8]**. Fifty years since inventing occult rock with *Witchcraft Destroys Minds And Reaps Souls*, Jinx Dawson emerges from a black coffin in a glittery gimp mask, her orgiastic incantations more witchy than ever. Although the metal crunch doesn't always do justice to the pop-psych nuances of 60s originals, it is a delirious, compelling spectacle.

ALL 10,000 PUNTERS AUDIBLY ADORE OZZY

Grown men are already in tears when **HELLOWEEN**'s **[9]** set begins, as Michael Kiske and Kai Hansen bestride the dazzling pumpkin-strewn stage set, rejoining their old band for a phenomenal celebration spanning the German metal legends' 33-year career. Most thrilling is the Kai-fronted *Walls Of Jericho* medley, but the encore of *I Want Out and Future World* sends middle-aged heartrates soaring.

The crowd thins for **KVELERTAK [8]**, yet finds new levels of volume and excitement as a younger, fitter demographic seizes the garrison. There's crowdsurfing and circlepitting to the Norwegians' energetic death-punk black'n'roll, bringing this magnificent event to a close on a high note of danger and intensity. All stripes of metalhead are well-served by this strategic stronghold. No mud, elegant architecture, stirring history, spectacular views – Tons Of Rock is literally a higher class of metal festival.

CHRIS CHANTLER

Troy Sanders: part Sasquatch, part Mastodon

Mastodon have come a long way since rocking the Casbah

Les Claypool leads the summertime knees-up

PRIMUS

MASTODON/JJUUJJUU

CAL COAST CREDIT UNION OPEN AIR THEATER, SAN DIEGO

Progressive pioneers join forces on the West Coast

TWO HOURS NORTH, a week-long heatwave is mercilessly roasting any Los Angeles resident foolish enough to venture outdoors. Here in San Diego, however, the weather remains typically perfect and as the sun sets over the amphitheatre, LA retro-rockers **JJUUJJUU [7]** initiate tonight's festivities with a kaleidoscopic deluge of brain-tingling psychedelia. Though one sprawling jam bleeds into the next, the crowd acknowledge their workmanlike set with throaty appreciation.

What unites **MASTODON [8]** with tonight's headliner isn't their sound but their voracious appetite for proggy experimentalism. Opening with *Sultan's Curse,* from *Emperor Of Sand*, the Atlanta quartet waste zero time diving into the frenzied, dual-fretted virtuosity that underpins their compositions. Guitarists Brent Hinds and Bill Kelliher effortlessly weave together taut, intricate patterns while drummer Brann Dailor rattles off thunderous polyrhythms that threaten to dislodge the tectonic plates beneath us. Bearded, spidery-legged bassist Troy Sanders swaps vocals with Brent and Brann as the band plow through a relentlessly heavy and balanced mix of old and new songs, including *Divinations, Megalodon, Andromeda* and closers *Mother Puncher* and *Steambreather*. After the set, Brann takes the mic as the others leave the stage and joyfully recalls playing San Diego's tiny, but legendary Casbah club, 20 years before. He then promises to shower, grab a drink and come out and watch the rest of the show with the crowd.

If you're hoping to catch **PRIMUS [7]** live this year, your window of opportunity has nearly closed, as tonight is the second-to-last stop on their summer tour. A handful of dates remain in September, after which the band plan on taking an extended hiatus, according to bassist and founder Les Claypool. Opening with *To Defy The Laws Of Tradition, Pudding Time* and *Here Come The Bastards*, Les stomps around in wide circles and banters genially with the crowd, but instrumental jams dominate the set. With guitarist Larry LaLonde and drummer Tim Alexander, the trio meticulously craft sparse, driving grooves, gradually adding one new element at time until the tracks erupt into a feverish, funked-out chorus. The energy ebbs when the band enter the middle tier of their set, playing the entirety of their latest release, *The Desaturating Seven*. Looking around, most people have taken their seats by that album's closer, *The Ends?* As the end draws near, the band inspire a heroic recovery from the audience, closing with *Jerry Was A Race Car Driver* and encore *John The Fisherman*. A chilled-out but massively enjoyable way to spend a warm summer night.

JOE DALY

SETLIST

MASTODON

Sultan's Curse
Divinations
Crystal Skull
Ancient Kingdom
Bladecatcher
Black Tongue
Ember City
Megalodon
Andromeda
Toe To Toes
Sleeping Giant
Show Yourself
Precious Stones
Roots Remain
Ghost Of Karelia
Mother Puncher
Steambreather

TREMONTI

PYRAMIDS CENTRE, PORTSMOUTH

It's only been six years since Mark Tremonti ventured beyond his status as the near-silent axeman of Alter Bridge, transforming into a rock'n'roll frontman in his own right. But as his solo band bombard Portsmouth, you could easily assume that he's been manning the lead singer slot for decades. Clearly brimming with confidence, Tremonti seizes the stage to the thrashing sound of *You Waste Your Time*, setting an appropriate precedent as the almighty guitar dominates from the get-go. Six-string complexity is front and centre for the entire night, with Mark and co-conspirator Eric Friedman giddily trading face-melting solos. While slower cuts like *Trust* and *The Things I've Seen* remind onlookers of Mark's more melody-driven work in Creed and Alter Bridge early on, the set's latter half only sees the adrenaline build. "Come fly with us, Portsmouth!" Mark bellows as he commences the powerful groove metal of *Flying Monkeys*. By the time *Wish You Well* has closed proceedings in a thunderous flurry, tonight's crowd is energised to the point of delirium.

8

MATT MILLS

TURNSTILE

BOSTON MUSIC ROOM, LONDON

Waiting until the end of England's match against Croatia before taking to the stage was a smart move by Turnstile this evening. Not only do they get a far larger crowd, they get one riled up and ready to riot on account of football's refusal to come home. It adds extra frisson to tonight's proceedings, but you feel that a band on this sort of terrorising form would have got similar levels of prison riot-style chaos regardless of any other context. With the release of this year's *Time And Space* album, Turnstile have evolved into something more than just a bouncy, 90s-inspired hardcore band, but live the lo-fi hip-hop and dreamy indie pop heard on the record take a back seat to pure stomp. Songs like *Moon* sound faster, grittier and more muscular than their recorded versions, with every member of Turnstile seemingly intent on throwing themselves around with just as much gusto as the endless number of stagedivers and crowdsurfers that fill the venue from beginning to end.

8

STEPHEN HILL

MASTODON: STEPHANIE CABRAL/MINISTRY: JAMES SHARROCK/TOUCHÉ AMORÉ: MARIE KORNER

Ministry subject the Forum to some sonic and visual battery

Al Jourgensen cranks up the chaos

MINISTRY

CHELSEA WOLFE

FORUM, LONDON

Industrial warhorses ride the minute hand to midnight

OUTSIDE, THE SKY is on fire and the earth is burning. But that's nothing next to the oppressive heat inside the Forum, where the air hangs heavy with sweat thick enough to drink. It's the perfect environment for Ministry, a band who have spent the last 30 years stoking the furnaces of chaos. Before Al Jourgensen and his lords of misrule send the mercury through the roof, drone-metal witch queen **CHELSEA WOLFE [7]** provides a welcome blast of ice-cold air. Lit from behind and looking 13 feet tall, she's a mesmerising presence, while songs such as *Spun* and *16 Psyche* drift in from the haunted parts of the city. It's an unlikely pairing, but the perspiring mass in front of her approves.

MINISTRY [8] have always thrived on chaos, and the threat of impending apocalypse – whether via climate change or a moron in the White House – is grist to their turbocharged mill. Tonight, flanked by giant inflatable anti-Nazi Trump-resembling chickens, they sound like the most scabrous, vindictive band on the planet. It starts sluggishly. *Twilight Zone*, from this year's *AmeriKKKant* album, lumbers like a sedated elephant, but things soon click into gear; *Victims Of A Clown* and *Lies Lies Lies* sound like civilisations collapsing in on themselves, while *Antifa* sees a pair of the eponymous anti-fascist movement's flags hoisted high. But Al knows what everyone's really here for: *Just One Fix, NWO, Thieves, So What* – songs written back when both the world and Ministry seemed like they couldn't get any crazier. Tonight, in the heart of the volcano, it's clear just how wrong we were.

DAVE EVERLEY

Touché Amoré fight their own pitched battle on the night

Gender Roles: Tom Bennett has pink rock attitude

TOUCHÉ AMORÉ

GENDER ROLES

THE DOME, LONDON

Post-hardcore heroes have a set of two halves

FORCED TO WAIT for their entertainment's start due to a certain football match of supposed national interest, the sport-phobic are amply rewarded by Brighton-based openers **GENDER ROLES [7]**. Striking nostalgic chords that recall the heyday of 90s grunge and indie, the trio dish out a versatile selection of emotive indie-punk numbers from their most recent EP, *Lazer Rush*. Vocalist Tom Bennett flexes a youthful melodic vigour framed with agitated, punky screams, and despite a handful of fumbled moments owing to tuning issues and forgotten setlists, their amiable banter between songs – and overall performance – presents an entertaining start to the night.

The arrival of post-hardcore headliner **TOUCHÉ AMORÉ [7]** fills the sold-out venue with a unanimous swell of adoration. Hands extend and voices ring out the lyrics of *Rapture, Uppers* and most recent single *Green* as the Canadian quintet tear though milestone tracks from more than a decade of activity. Though crowd interaction is kept to a minimum, vocalist Jeremy Bolm leads with confidence as the boisterous array of angst-ridden aggression pours from the stage. It's enjoyable for the most part, but limited dynamic and atmospheric exploration and tendency to maintain a breakneck pace causes a loss of impact towards the latter half. Touché Amoré's strong UK fanbase may be deserving of a little more, and their blink-and-you'll-miss-it encore feels like an underwhelming end to their capital city tour date.

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OF MICE & MEN

The metalcore mavens join BFMV in arenas this autumn

HOW'S YOUR SUMMER GOING SO FAR?

Aaron Pauley (bass/vocals): "It's cool to have downtime in the summer. It's been years since we had that. But we released [recent album] *Defy*, we've toured Europe and the US. We've toured with In Flames and Five Finger Death Punch… It's been a good year."

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN TOURING HABITS?

"Touring is kind of like Groundhog Day, so I guess technically everything we do is a ritual when you're on tour. I like playing videogames and drinking coffee."

HOW DO YOU MAKE A TOUR BUS FEEL LIKE HOME WHEN YOU'RE ON THE ROAD?

"It's the people you're with. I don't know if the tour bus ever feels like home. It always just feels like the bus. But it's the people you share it with. That and I guess just trash in my bunk – putting all my dirty clothes in the corner of my bunk!"

WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT PLAYING THE UK?

"The fans! You guys go so hard. Nobody is worried about looking cool – everyone is there to have a good time. The last Download was hard to top. It was just massive. I think we played at about 3.30pm and the crowd was just amazing."

YOU'RE ABOUT TO TOUR WITH BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE. DO YOU KNOW THOSE GUYS?

"I think we've met before and I'm sure we played shows back in the day, but this is one of those things that a lot of people have said should have happened a long time ago. Now it's finally working out. I think we share a common fanbase with regards to the music we make and the stuff we discuss in our music. We're easygoing, we get along with everybody, so I'm anticipating more friendship."

YOU'LL BE PLAYING ARENAS ON THIS ONE, INCLUDING A STOP AT LONDON'S HISTORIC ALEXANDRA PALACE. ARE YOU EXCITED?

"The Ally Pally gig is wild. I've seen videos of Architects and Bring Me doing it. I wanna play there, so the fact we're going to get to do that is pretty sick. We're gonna start some moshpits methinks!"

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- **OCT 11 CARDIFF** MOTORPOINT ARENA

CLUTCH
- **DEC 18 BRISTOL** O2 ACADEMY
- **DEC 19 GLASGOW** O2 ACADEMY
- **DEC 20 MANCHESTER** ACADEMY
- **DEC 21 LONDON** O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
- **DEC 22 BIRMINGHAM** O2 ACADEMY

CROSSFAITH
- **OCT 13 BRISTOL** MARBLE ACADEMY
- **OCT 15 GLASGOW** GARAGE
- **OCT 16 NOTTINGHAM** ROCK CITY
- **OCT 17 MANCHESTER** ACADEMY 2
- **OCT 19 LONDON** ELECTRIC BALLROOM

DEF LEPPARD
CHEAP TRICK
- **DEC 1 DUBLIN** 3 ARENA
- **DEC 2 BELFAST** SSE ARENA
- **DEC 4 CARDIFF** MOTORPOINT ARENA
- **DEC 6 LONDON** O2 ARENA
- **DEC 8 NOTTINGHAM** MOTORPOINT ARENA
- **DEC 9 NEWCASTLE** METRO RADIO ARENA
- **DEC 11 GLASGOW** SSE HYDRO ARENA
- **DEC 12 MANCHESTER** ARENA
- **DEC 14 SHEFFIELD** FLYDSA ARENA
- **DEC 15 LIVERPOOL** ECHO ARENA
- **DEC 17 BIRMINGHAM** ARENA

DORO
- **MAR 12 MANCHESTER** REBELLION
- **MAR 13 LONDON** UNDERWORLD

EUROPE
KING KING
- **SEP 11 BELFAST** WATERFRONT
- **SEP 12 DUBLIN** OLYMPIA THEATRE
- **SEP 14 MANCHESTER** ACADEMY
- **SEP 15 GLASGOW** BARROWLAND
- **SEP 17 NEWCASTLE** O2 ACADEMY
- **SEP 18 NOTTINGHAM** ROCK CITY
- **SEP 19 BIRMINGHAM** O2 INSTITUTE
- **SEP 21 CARDIFF** ST DAVID'S HALL
- **SEP 22 PORTSMOUTH** PYRAMID CENTRE
- **SEP 23 LONDON** ROYAL ALBERT HALL
- **SEP 24 BRIGHTON** DOME

GLASSJAW
- **AUG 18 LONDON** O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

HALESTORM
AVATAR
- **SEP 19 DUBLIN** ACADEMY
- **SEP 20 BELFAST** LIMELIGHT
- **SEP 22 SHEFFIELD** ACADEMY
- **SEP 23 GLASGOW** O2 ACADEMY
- **SEP 24 BIRMINGHAM** O2 ACADEMY
- **SEP 26 MANCHESTER** O2 APOLLO
- **SEP 28 LONDON** O2 ACADEMY BRIXTON
- **SEP 29 BRISTOL** O2 ACADEMY

INCUBUS
- **SEP 3 BIRMINGHAM** O2 ACADEMY
- **SEP 6 LONDON** O2 ACADEMY
- **SEP 8 MANCHESTER** O2 APOLLO
- **SEP 10 BELFAST** ULSTER HALL
- **SEP 11 DUBLIN** BORD GÁIS ENERGY THEATRE

KILLING JOKE
- **NOV 2 NOTTINGHAM** ROCK CITY
- **NOV 3 LEEDS** O2 ACADEMY
- **NOV 4 NEWCASTLE** NORTHUMBRIA INSTITUTE
- **NOV 6 GLASGOW** BARROWLAND
- **NOV 7 MANCHESTER** ACADEMY
- **NOV 9 BIRMINGHAM** O2 INSTITUTE
- **NOV 10 BRISTOL** O2 ACADEMY
- **NOV 11 SOUTHAMPTON** O2 GUILDHALL
- **NOV 13 CAMBRIDGE** CORN EXCHANGE
- **NOV 14 NORWICH** UEA
- **NOV 16 OXFORD** O2 ACADEMY
- **NOV 17 LONDON** ROUNDHOUSE

MYRKUR
- **DEC 18 LONDON** THE DOME
- **DEC 19 BRISTOL** THE FLEECE
- **DEC 20 NOTTINGHAM** RESCUE ROOMS
- **DEC 21 GLASGOW** THE GREAT EASTERN
- **DEC 22 MANCHESTER** GORILLA

Live & Evil

NIGHTWISH
BEAST IN BLACK
DEC 8 LONDON WEMBLEY ARENA
DEC 10 BIRMINGHAM ARENA
DEC 11 MANCHESTER ARENA

PARKWAY DRIVE
JAN 29 MANCHESTER O2 APOLLO
JAN 31 NOTTINGHAM MOTORPOINT ARENA
FEB 1 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
FEB 2 LONDON ALEXANDRA PALACE

POWERWOLF
AMARANTHE, KISSIN' DYNAMITE
NOV 12 LONDON KOKO

ROLO TOMASSI
AUG 16 BRISTOL ARCTANGENT FESTIVAL
OCT 30 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
OCT 31 BOURNEMOUTH THE ANVIL
NOV 01 CARDIFF CLWB IFOR BACH
NOV 02 NORWICH WATERFRONT
NOV 09 LONDON SCALA

SAXON
WAYWARD SONS
OCT 18 GLASGOW BARROWLAND (WITH Y&T)
OCT 19 LONDON ROUNDHOUSE (WITH Y&T)
OCT 20 PORTSMOUTH GUILDHALL (WITH Y&T)
OCT 21 MANCHESTER ACADEMY (WITH Y&T)
NOV 8 BATH FORUM (WITH DORO)
NOV 10 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL (WITH DORO)
NOV 11 NEWCASTLE CITY HALL (WITH DORO)

SIKTH
LOATHE
SEP 12 STOKE UNDERGROUND
SEP 13 NEWCASTLE THINK TANK
SEP 14 SHEFFIELD THE PLUG
SEP 15 LIVERPOOL HANGAR 34
SEP 16 CARDIFF GLOBE
SEP 18 PLYMOUTH THE JUNCTION
SEP 19 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
SEP 20 OXFORD BULLINGDON

SINSAENUM
OCT 19 LONDON THE DOME

SKELETONWITCH
MANTAR
DEC 4 MANCHESTER REBELLION
DEC 5 BIRMINGHAM MAMA ROUX'S
DEC 6 LONDON UNDERWORLD

SLAYER
LAMB OF GOD, ANTHRAX, OBITUARY
NOV 1 DUBLIN 3 ARENA
NOV 3 LONDON WEMBLEY ARENA
NOV 5 CARDIFF MOTORPOINT ARENA
NOV 7 BIRMINGHAM ARENA
NOV 9 MANCHESTER ARENA
NOV 10 NEWCASTLE METRO RADIO ARENA
NOV 12 GLASGOW SSE HYDRO

THERAPY?
NOV 8 CARDIFF GLOBE
NOV 9 SOUTHAMPTON ENGINE ROOMS
NOV 10 NORWICH WATERFRONT
NOV 11 NOTTINGHAM RESCUE ROOMS
NOV 12 GLASGOW GARAGE
NOV 13 SHEFFIELD O2 ACADEMY 2
NOV 15 STOKE SUGARMILL
NOV 16 MANCHESTER GORILLA
NOV 17 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
NOV 19 BRIGHTON CONCORDE2
NOV 20 BRISTOL SWX
NOV 21 EXETER PHOENIX
NOV 22 LONDON O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON
NOV 23 BIRMINGHAM ASYLUM

WARDRUNA
NOV 19 EDINBURGH THE QUEEN'S HALL
NOV 21 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
NOV 22 LONDON SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

HAMMER PRESENTS
WITHIN TEMPTATION
NOV 9 BIRMINGHAM O2 ACADEMY
NOV 10 MANCHESTER ACADEMY
NOV 11 GLASGOW O2 ACADEMY
NOV 13 LONDON O2 BRIXTON ACADEMY

ZEAL & ARDOR
NOV 30 BRISTOL THE FLEECE
DEC 1 BRIGHTON THE HAUNT
DEC 1 LONDON ELECTRIC BALLROOM
DEC 4 BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE 2
DEC 5 MANCHESTER GORILLA
DEC 6 LEEDS CHURCH
DEC 7 GLASGOW KING TUTS

AMARANTHE
They're out with Powerwolf – bring extra underwear!

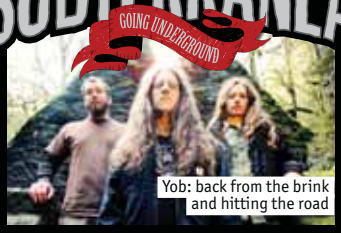
HOW HAS 2018 BEEN SO FAR FOR YOU GUYS?
Elize Ryd (vocals): "We've been working on our fifth album! We took three months' writing time and we went into the studio in March and stayed there for two months. Now we're excited about the European festival season and our autumn tour with Powerwolf because we're going to Israel for the first time, just before my birthday."

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE TOURING MOMENT TO DATE?
"We got to go on tours very early in our career so all our shows and meeting all the fans have been the best parts. I'm an adventure person, so I like to live in the moment and watch the view while we're travelling. Nothing shocks me anymore, so the bus feels like a second home. I was lucky enough to stay in tents and do a lot of the nightlife stuff when I was a kid so this isn't much different. You need to be open and not have too high standards to live on tour; my friends in the music industry say they'd rather die than live on the bus!"

WHAT'S THE STRANGEST THING YOU'VE SEEN IN AN AMARANTHE CROWD?
"In Malmö, Sweden, some guy threw his underwear up onstage and it landed on my face. I thought to myself, 'This is a development from back in the day when girls would throw their underpants!' I'm experiencing a change in the equilibrium between the genders. My father was there, too!"

WHAT CAN WE FIND THE AMARANTHE LOT UP TO ON DAYS OFF ON THE ROAD?
"Most of the guys go sightseeing. Johan [Andreassen, bass] goes running, Morten [Løwe Sørensen, drums] goes to the gym, Henrik [Englund, vocals] and Olof [Mörck, guitars] go to restaurants and bars and Nils [Molen, vocals] hasn't been here long enough to get a routine yet. I'm always either in the venue, in a coffee shop or cleaning the bus. I have a secret stash of cleaning products! I went into Arch Enemy's bus at Graspop and it was the cleanest bus I've ever been in – it smelled of fresh apples. You have to make goals for yourself in life, so that's mine: that someday our bus will be like that."

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND



Yob: back from the brink and hitting the road

DAMNATION FESTIVAL
IHSAHN, BATUSHKA, THE OCEAN, FUKPIG + MORE
NOV 3 LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION

DEMILICH
SPECTRAL VOICE, NECROT, SODOMIZED CADAVER
SEP 16 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

FULL OF HELL
DAWN RAY'D, LEECHER
AUG 16 LINCOLN LIQUOR
AUG 17 BELFAST VOODOO
AUG 18 LIMERICK DOLANS
AUG 19 DUBLIN GRAND SOCIALS
AUG 20 BIRMINGHAM THE ASYLUM 2
AUG 21 NEWCASTLE TRILLIANS
AUG 22 BRISTOL ROUGH TRADE RECORDS
AUG 23 LONDON UNDERWORLD
AUG 23 BRIGHTON THE GREEN DOOR STORE
AUG 24 LEEDS TEMPLE OF BOOM

THE GREAT OLD ONES
AUÐN
NOV 14 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM (W/FEN)
NOV 15 MANCHESTER REBELLION (W/DAWN RAY'D)
NOV 16 GLASGOW AUDIO
NOV 17 NOTTINGHAM THE LEVEL (W/AKLASH, WOLVENCRAFT)

MYSTIFIER
SOLSTICE, CRAVEN IDOL
NOV 2 LONDON BOSTON MUSIC ROOM

NIBIRU
VAREGO, SURA
OCT 11 LONDON THE BLACK HEART

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE
JAYE JAYLE
NOV 3 MANCHESTER SOUP KITCHEN
NOV 4 BRISTOL ROUGH TRADE
NOV 6 GLASGOW STEREO
NOV 7 NEWCASTLE THE CLUNY
NOV 8 LONDON OSLO

VOIVOD
OCT 2 SOUTHAMPTON JOINERS
OCT 3 CARDIFF THE GLOBE
OCT 4 LEEDS TEMPLE OF BOOM
OCT 5 GLASGOW CATHOUSE
OCT 6 MANCHESTER REBELLION
OCT 7 LONDON UNDERWORLD

YOB
WIEGEDOOD
OCT 7 BRISTOL THE FLEECE
OCT 9 GLASGOW STEREO
OCT 10 LEEDS BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB
OCT 11 MANCHESTER GORILLA
OCT 12 LONDON THE GARAGE

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				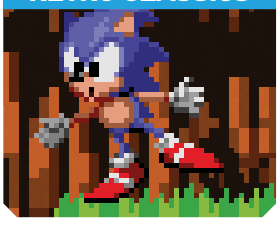

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GOING UNDERG

MANTAR
A TALE OF DESTRUCTION

PALLBEARER
A NIGHT OF DOOM DELIVERANCE

KHÔRADA
A NEW VISION FROM THE ASHES OF AGALLOCH

PLUS!
ALL THE MOST IN-DEPTH REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS FROM THE OUTER LIMITS!

"I WAS AT WAR WITH MYSELF"

ÅRABROT

NORWAY'S NOISE GURU FINDS HIS REDEMPTION SONG

Árabrot's Kjetil Nernes has broadened his horizons since he beat back throat cancer

ÅRABROT

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

REVIVAL INSTINCTS

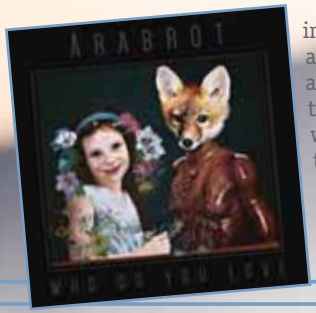
Having beaten throat cancer, Årabrot's irrepressible frontman, Kjetil Nernes, had to rediscover his roots to find a new way forward

WORDS: KEZ WHELAN

Despite his laidback, unassuming nature, Kjetil Nernes is a man of steely determination. Having helmed the Norwegian noise-rock outfit Årabrot since 2001, the guitarist/vocalist was dealt a devastating blow when he was diagnosed with throat cancer in 2014. Rather than throwing in the towel, however, Kjetil persisted to not only overcome the illness, but also embark on a successful European tour and record *The Gospel*, which enjoyed the most positive critical fanfare the band had received yet upon its release in 2016. And to make matters even more stressful, Kjetil was followed by a film crew the whole time for the almost uncomfortably revealing fly-on-the-wall documentary, *Cocks & Crosses*.

"I got used to it actually," he laughs nonchalantly. "I think that at that point, my life was so odd anyway that it didn't matter if I had a camera on me or anything else, really. Nothing really mattered. It was strange the first couple of days, but after that I forgot about the camera, which I guess is why the documentary came out the way it did, because I was just being myself that whole time. The director said that the deal was that he'd make this documentary, and I'd get all kinds of perks, like footage and photos and whatever else, but the thing was that it was his film, and I would not be able to see it before it came out. So I saw it for the first time at Norway's biggest film festival, the Norwegian International Film Festival, and it was the opening day, and it was even in my old home town, Haugesund, so it was chock-full of people and I was just sliding down in my chair. I got really self-conscious, but it came out really nice and I was happy with it. It's a very different kind of rock documentary; it's more about life, really."

Indeed, whilst ostensibly focusing on the creation of *The Gospel, Cocks & Crosses* has a much more intimate, philosophical bent than your average 'rockumentary', using Kjetil's experience as a springboard to explore themes of mortality, creativity, mysticism and even what it means to be human.



"The documentary definitely made an impact on people being interested in me, as a person, and us, as people and as artists, and also this place," says Kjetil, referring to the Dalarna, Sweden-based church studio where the band now record, "which gives the whole project a very different vibe. It kind of opens up our lives really, much more than in the past where it's been more vague, and maybe more dangerous in a way? Like, people wouldn't know who we were and it was just this crazy, loud, freaked-out music."

Cocks & Crosses may dispel some of the mystique surrounding the band, but it also paints Kjetil as a far more fascinating character than anything our twisted imaginations could have produced, and provides an unflinching snapshot of his state of mind at the time.

"The thing was, *The Gospel* was like war, you know?" he muses. "I tried to make the record sound like war, because I was at war with myself, and obviously after you go through that kind of life-threatening experience, it's a big explosion. After the big bang, you have that silence; like after a gunshot, you have that kind of big silence, and I was wondering what to do for a long time, what to do with that silence, and I think for some people maybe you would just be silent for a while, or else you try to fill that gap or that void with something else."

Finding himself "in the middle of that big silence, with the explosion still ringing in my ears," Kjetil sought a different kind of creative release, and set off on an English tour with writer (and *Hammer* alumni) John Doran in May 2015, augmenting John's whimsical spoken-word set with his own unique guitar drones. Bombing around the English countryside in John's car ("England is not that big, but it took us ages to get from place to place, it was ridiculous," he groans, "we were driving seven to 10 hours, it was almost like America. You know, it has to do with traffic and shit like that..."), the pair bonded over their shared passion for bands like Slayer, The Residents, The Stooges, Wire and Killing Joke.

> **"I WAS AT WAR WITH MYSELF"**
> KJETIL NERNES'S BATTLE AGAINST CANCER SPILLED INTO HIS MUSIC

"I decided to fill the gap with some sort of... well I've called it love often, but it's not really love, it's more like going back to the roots in many ways, going back to the rock music that I love," Kjetil smiles. "The trip where me and John travelled in that car all around England, just listening to all of this music, we were almost like teenagers again. We went back to all of this stuff that we just love, and it felt really good, it was like coming back to life, and I feel like this record is definitely me coming back to life."

The record in question, is *Who Do You Love*. After the harrowing portentousness of *The Gospel*, there's a noticeably looser, more joyous feel to this new one, with Kjetil tapping into that teenage enthusiasm and using it to create some of the most immediate, visceral music of his career.

"A lot of the ideas for this album, musically and thematically, came from the tour with John," he agrees. "We met a lot of fascinating people and also I heard so much music. There were

SUBTERRANEA
GOING UNDERGROUND

Årabrot: a close encounter of the weird kind

"I FEEL LIKE THIS RECORD IS ME COMING BACK TO LIFE"

KJETIL NERNES UNDERGOES A SPIRITUAL REBIRTH

so many inspiring things on that trip that then resulted in *Who Do You Love*. Even that title is a Bo Diddley song that John played me in the car."

Kjetil is adamant that he shouldn't take all the credit for *Who Do You Love*, however, with the band's current line-up – which includes Kjetil's wife Karin Park on synthesisers and Gnod's Alex Macarte on bass – providing much more creative input this time around.

"On *The Gospel*, it was very much me, making a record with partners, but this time around I felt for sure that it was definitely a band feeling. When we recorded it, it felt like a band, and when we produced it, it was me and Karin producing the whole thing, and it definitely felt like a joint effort, which I think adds to it. There's a good flow to it."

Compared to the mental turmoil that birthed *The Gospel*, *Who Do You Love* was apparently a much easier record to put together. "It's very different for each album, sometimes things just get more complicated for several reasons, but this time..." he pauses, searching for the words, "it just happened, and it came out exactly how I envisioned it."

This spontaneous vibe lead to some nice surprises, too, like the band's last-minute interpretation of *Sinnerman*, an old spiritual made famous by Nina Simone.

"I had a few days off in the studio here, and I was just kind of playing with the song, on guitar, and I just happened to make a quick demo of it," Kjetil explains. "The demo was quite cool, and had this atmosphere to it that I really enjoyed, so I made another demo and it had the same vibe to it, so we just did it. I just decided, 'Let's just do it, let's record this song.' And I didn't even have a plan to include it on the record, at all, but here it is. It was even the first single," he laughs.

As with *The Gospel*, the band once again opted to record drums in Chicago at Steve Albini's Electrical Audio, before returning to their church studio, "the church of Årabrot".

"It's a good set-up, it works really well for us, so I can't imagine we'd do it somewhere else," says Kjetil. "The church creates such an atmosphere, and it colours the music. It works really well for us, so I see no point in doing anything else really."

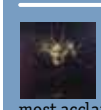
As he says himself in *Cocks & Crosses*, "there's no turning back now"; with Kjetil once again in fine health and the cult of Årabrot continuing to spread far and wide, the frontman has never been surer of what he wants to do with his life. He's never felt better doing it either, promising a new EP next year plus a collaboration with Andrew Liles of Nurse With Wound and Current 93 fame under the name Årabrot Speciale, that he says will show "a very, very different side" of the band.

"Maybe in the past I've always been a bit anxious about the whole thing," he says of the band in general. "I knew that we were gonna do this, but I'd always be like, 'Why do I keep on going when all the money just goes down the drain?' and 'Why do I do these tours that are just exhausting to me?' But once you've kind of settled with the idea that this is going to be your life from now on, you kind of loosen up on a few of those itches and that nervousness. So it feels a bit more secure, I don't have to doubt myself as much." ✠

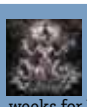
***WHO DO YOU LOVE* IS OUT NOW ON FYSISK FORMAT**

MORTAL COMBAT

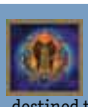
Three albums whose protagonists faced down death



BEHEMOTH
The Satanist (*2014*)
One of the most acclaimed extreme metal albums of all time, this richly evocative journey through the darkest of shadows was inspired primarily by frontman Nergal's battle with leukaemia. You can almost hear the sickness churning away in the scabrous riffs of *Messe Noire* and *In The Absence Ov Light*. Metal has seldom been so vivid or raw.



BELPHEGOR
Conjuring The Dead (*2014*)
It took six weeks for Belphegor frontman Helmuth Lehner to recover from a vicious dose of typhoid fever, contracted through drinking from infected water while on tour in South America in 2011. Having survived, he channelled the experience into his band's 10th album, bellowing *'Disease and suffering will set you free!'* with mad-eyed venom.



YOB
Our Raw Heart (*2018*)
Surely destined to be one of this year's most celebrated albums, *Our Raw Heart* was written after Yob frontman Mike Scheidt nearly died from an attack of acute diverticulitis, an insanely painful intestinal disease. As a result, every riff, melody and moment of wild, psychedelic madness oozes profound mortal melancholy.

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THE FIRE AND THE FURY

Mantar might be a two-piece, but their combined, primitive power is laying waste to delirious audiences, and anything else in their path

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

His music is among the most intense and vicious available to human ears, yet there is a good chance that you would really like Mantar singer/guitarist Hanno Klänhardt. With an almost permanent mischievous twinkle in his eye, the rake-thin and irrepressibly energetic German clearly enjoys talking about his band, not least because they're poised to release their third (and best) album, *The Modern Art Of Setting Ablaze*. Although he has lived with his wife in Gainesville, Florida, for several years, Hanno has returned to his home city of Bremen for the summer, in order to make his band's impending European festival run less of a logistical nightmare. Judging by the new album's contents, life in the Sunshine State has done nothing to diminish the insane intensity of Mantar's music: if anything, this is their angriest record yet.

"I'm happy to have a base in Germany for a while," Hanno grins. "But I promise you, you get used to the sunshine and palm trees in Florida very fast! I guess it's not the obvious place for me to live, but I keep the misery and the darkness in the music and I'd just rather drink a beer in the sun, you know? I've lived in Bremen so I know what rain means. I've had over 30 years of constant rain in my life, and trust me, that's enough to write black metal records for the next 600 years. So I'm all set. You'll find me in the sun, ha ha!"

A tour de force of unremittingly bleak but weirdly catchy sonic violence, *The Modern Art…* is no radical departure from the oppressive, exhilarating extremity of Mantar's first two albums – 2014's *Death By Burning* and 2016's *Ode To The Flame* – but it gets to its jaw-shattering point much quicker and with vastly more impact. Despite the ubiquity of two-piece bands in the underground scene, the German duo's hostile blend of hardcore punk, black metal and sludge has evolved into something sharply distinctive and borderline accessible. Thematically and lyrically, the album feels like the perfect soundtrack to the world's current state of simmering agitation, even though Mantar's fiercely non-political stance remains intact.

"The world had way more impact and influence on this album than on the previous two," Hanno avows. "Obviously the track *Age Of The Absurd* is talking about that. But people ask me, 'How can you live in the US with Trump? It's such a fucked-up country!' But how can *you* live in Germany with the right wing rising again? The world is up to shit *everywhere*. With these despots, whether it's Trump or some right-wing dickheads in Austria, the Netherlands, France or Scandinavia, people just don't want to *learn*, man. The whole atmosphere and mood among the people is just as poisoned in Germany as it is in the States. It's rare to go anywhere and not feel that pressure."

And so Mantar have taken it upon themselves to release some of that pressure. If you've ever seen the band live, you'll know how monstrously physical and intense their performances are. No album could capture that intensity, of course, but *The Modern Art…* comes damn close and it's the unapologetic nature of Mantar's aggression, their wilful extremity and near-psychotic focus, that make new songs like *Age Of The Absurd* and *Anti Eternia* sound like snapshots from some unholy, epoch-wrenching street riot. Satisfyingly, Hanno makes no attempts to intellectualise the aggression in Mantar's music: instead, he revels in its liberating fervour.

"I *enjoy* it. It's about the beauty of destruction," he notes. "When I was young, there were certain kids who'd sit down for a week and build something out of matchsticks and bits of paper, like a little castle. When I found old electronics in the street, I took them home and smashed them with a hammer. It had such an impact on me, seeing things break apart. I've always been a person who enjoys violence and aggression. Not in the sense of watching UFC and seeing people breaking each

> "I USED TO PICK THINGS UP IN THE STREET, TAKE THEM HOME AND SMASH THEM UP"
>
> HANNO KLÄNHARDT EMBRACES HIS DESTRUCTIVE SIDE

SUBTERRANEA

GOING UNDERGROUND

Mantar (left to right): Erinc Sakarya and Hanno Klänhardt

other's bones. That's too one-dimensional for me. What I'm interested in is when you can see the *urge*, for that outlet for aggression, in people's faces. Personally, that always moves me a lot."

Hanno and drumming comrade Erinc Sakarya have known each other for over 20 years. They first joined forces as fellow musicians in Bremen's underground punk scene but only came together creatively in 2012. Firmly rooted in the culture and sonic tropes of anarcho punk, their undeniably metallic sound seems to have evolved more by accident than design. As Hanno relates with great delight, Erinc "doesn't know shit about heavy metal" and prefers to listen to The Sisters Of Mercy, Duran Duran and old-school hip hop. Meanwhile, the frontman alternates between listening to "YouTube primitive raw black metal stuff from 1995 that has 112 plays" and, significantly, lots and lots of AC/DC. It might be a stretch to say that *The Modern Art…* is full of Angus-inspired anthems, but a devout adherence to the rock legends' principles of simplicity and primitive power is more than apparent. Hanno, who is wearing an AC/DC shirt as if to prove the point, is happy to confirm the debt.

"Oh man, I *think* AC/DC. I judge the food I eat, how it tastes, in AC/DC measurements because I'm *obsessed* with them," he chuckles. "No day goes by when I don't listen to this band. When I was six my dad gave me *If You Want Blood…* and it just had that live energy. I'm a primitive Viking when it comes to music. I need the fists of the people in the air. That is a good measurement for a good riff. I've never tried to reinvent the wheel. I just wanted to have my own celebration, my own beautiful ritual of destruction, and this is the soundtrack I wrote for it."

As much as he is relishing the prospect of terrorising metal fans across Europe this summer, it is still clear that Hanno is surprised and genuinely chuffed that Mantar have made such progress over the last few years. What was originally intended chiefly as an excuse for two old friends to make a horrible, cathartic noise together in a small, sweaty room turned into something much more significant and widely celebrated. But despite the fact that the new album will be their highest-profile release to date, Hanno insists that Mantar exists solely for the noise, the aggression and that all-important sense of release. If other people want to join in, all the better, but this carnival of destruction is happening either way.

"This is primitive music for primitive people… played by primitive kids!" Hanno grins. "I'm going to write that down! Ha ha! But I don't try to find a reason for our aggression. I don't offer solutions. I just *report*. I don't try to make our aggression legit, like [adopts whiny voice] 'This is why we're angry and this is why we play loud, because our message is so strong and important!' Bullshit. I want to throw bottles at the wall." ✠

***THE MODERN ART OF SETTING ABLAZE* IS OUT ON AUGUST 24 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. MANTAR TOUR THIS DECEMBER – SEE P.109**

Khôrada: an entirely new beast

MOURNFUL, EXPANSIVE MAJESTY!

KHÔRADA

Agalloch exiles forge an exhilarating new emotional path

WORDS: JOE DALY

It's rare that a band will deliver exactly what you'd expect and in doing so, still blow your mind. More often than not, it's the sound of the exotic and unfamiliar that catches your senses unaware, arresting the mind and igniting the imagination. Formed by former members of Agalloch and Giant Squid, Khôrada have slipped loose of any expectations, conjuring something uniquely heavy, raw and deeply emotional.

In 2016, Agalloch founder John Haughm dissolved the band, eventually forming Pillorian. For the remaining three members – guitarist Don Anderson, bassist Jason Walton and drummer Aesop Dekker – parting ways was not an option. Jason explains, "Don, Aesop and I saw no reason to stop playing together after the Agalloch break-up. We were close friends, had played together for years and worked very well together. I think we've all made it painfully clear that the dissolution of Agalloch was not our wish, so we decided the same day that the band broke up that we would form something fresh and new."

To pick up where Agalloch left off would have been the easy route but the guys united in a resolution to avoid something so obvious, regardless of how it might play among fans. "It would have been very easy for us three to get another guy who plays guitar and growls," says Jason, "and make another extreme metal record. We could have attempted to slide effortlessly into that void that the death of Agalloch created. I mean, we had a built-in fanbase already, why wouldn't we just continue down the same trail that Agalloch blazed for 20 years but with someone new? The answer is because that's lazy and ultimately, that's not art."

They turned to their friend and former labelmate Aaron John 'AJ' Gregory as their new frontman. "We all had a lot of respect and admiration for AJ and it seemed like a logical choice for us," says Jason. "AJ is a great guitarist, amazing lyricist and a wonderful songwriter. Most importantly, he is a man I respect and admire. That is why AJ was the perfect man to join us on this journey."

> "We didn't do what people wanted us to do"
> **JASON WALTON**

Often when members of established bands form a new group, the music falls into some arbitrary space between the two bands but Khôrada sound like neither Agalloch nor AJ's band, Giant Squid. In fact, their debut album, *Salt*, represents a wholesale genre migration. Rumbling waves of doom push and pull, building into surging crescendos that break over AJ's wailing vocals and heart-rending lyrics. It's safe to say that the dominant vestigial remnants of Agalloch lie not in the music but in the wild, visionary spirit that permeates each of the seven tracks. "We didn't do what people wanted us to do. We didn't write *The Mantle* again. We made music for ourselves."

With an exhilarating new outlook and a debut album finding much love among fans and critics, Khôrada could be forgiven for speculating what the future might hold, but the guys are living squarely in the moment. "I could speculate," Jason says, "but I don't care to. At this point I am happy we've finished our debut and I am just enjoying that." ✠

LINE-UP: AJ Gregory (vocals, guitar), Don Anderson (guitar), Jason Walton (bass), Aesop Dekker (drums)
HOMETOWN: Oakland, Portland, Pacifica
SOUNDS LIKE: A rueful examination of nature's ruin amidst a slowly-churning vortex of sludgy riffs, spiralling melodies and dark, chilly emptiness.
FOR FANS OF: Yob, Sannhet, The Moth Gatherer
CURRENT RELEASE: *Salt* (Prophecy Productions, 2018)
WEBSITE: www.facebook.com/khorada

Carnation: blooming marvellous

BLISTERING DEATH METAL MASTERY!

CARNATION

Belgian blastbeat aficionados reach for perfection

WORDS: KEZ WHELAN

"I started listening to death metal at a fairly young age. I was always interested in how broad the genre can be," begins Carnation vocalist Simon Duson. "Death metal can be fast, slow, melodic, technical, aggressive… there are so many options available. We also try to experiment with these different ingredients and not stick to the same formula in every song. Changing up speeds keeps the album interesting and diverse."

This reverence for the genre shines through in the Belgians' sprawling debut full-length, *Chapel Of Abhorrence*, an exhilarating blast of filth that feels noticeably more powerful than their 2015 EP, *Cemetery Of The Insane*.

"Because this is our debut album, we felt that it was really important to take our time with the writing and recording process and not pressure ourselves with unnecessary deadlines," says Simon. "The biggest difference between the EP and the album is the time investment. When we were working on the EP, we wanted to release something as quickly as possible to get out there and get Carnation off the ground. For *Chapel Of Abhorrence*, it was more important to go for the perfect take, even if it took us a lot longer to record it."

Given how much attention the EP received – the band toured Japan and Brazil with Pestilence off the back of it – Carnation are poised to reach even greater heights once *Chapel…* hits shelves, and Simon can't wait.

"Our live shows are without a doubt our strongest feature," he beams. "We invest a lot of time and resources into our live set-up to keep changing it and improving it. Not only the sound has to be great, but visually it also must fit the music. It's difficult to accomplish this as a relatively small band but it is also a lot more rewarding when we manage to pull it off. Creating the right atmosphere with lights and other visual effects simply takes the music up to another level… We invite you to come and experience it yourself!" ✠

Who are they?

LINE-UP: Simon Duson (vocals), Bert Vervoort (guitar), Jonathan Verstrepen (guitar), Yarne Heylen (bass), Vincent Verstrepen (drums)
HOMETOWN: Antwerp, Belgium
SOUNDS LIKE: Old-school DM with satisfying grooves.
FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Dismember, Vomitory
CURRENT RELEASE: *Chapel Of Abhorrence* (Season Of Mist, 2018)
WEBSITE: www.carnationband.com

Tomb Mold: DM purists

SQUIRMING, OLD-SCHOOL DM DELIRIUM!

TOMB MOLD

Canadian purists find a new form of regression

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

As death metal splinters into ever more disparate strands, Tomb Mold's exhilarating harnessing of dense, old-school squall marks them out as one of the modern era's most fervent purists. And yet, as guitarist Derrick Vella explains, the songs on the Canadians' second album, *Manor Of Infinite Forms*, are primarily the result of instinct.

"For me personally, death metal has to be imaginative and it has to have spirit," says guitarist Derrick Vella. "I'm not too picky about stuff sounding 'old school' or filthy, as much as I like those things. I just want to see a clear vision, an interesting aesthetic and good riffs. I try not to think too much about what I write… I just let it happen."

Formed by Derrick and drummer/vocalist Max Klebanoff in 2015, Tomb Mold began as a conscious attempt to ape the scabrous brutality of early Finnish death, with a side order of mid-90s USDM worship thrown in for good measure. Despite those obvious influences, however, *Manor Of Infinite Forms* has a deliciously idiosyncratic feel to it, the band's lyrical preoccupations, knack for warped surrealism and those grotesque, churning riffs setting them measurably apart from the scowling hordes.

"On the surface, this record deals with finding a passage to an ancient subterranean civilisation living inside the planet," Derrick explains. "But the themes behind the record include loss, ascension, being torn apart from within, past-life hypnosis and hallucinations. The title refers to one's mind and how it can be changed or manipulated."

Speaking of change, Tomb Mold's original ambitions were endearingly humble and low-key, but the band are swiftly getting used to the idea that death metal fans can spot the real, darkness-embracing deal when they hear it. "The original idea was to record a couple of demo tapes, sell 'em online and then pack it in!" Derrick notes. "But now we'll tour more, make another record and hopefully cross the water to play in the UK, Europe and elsewhere, too. This has definitely exceeded expectations!" ✠

Who are they?

LINE-UP: Max Klebanoff (drums, vocals), Derrick Vella (guitar), Payson Power (guitars), Steve Musgrave (bass)
HOMETOWN: Toronto, Canada
SOUNDS LIKE: Doom-tinged 90s death metal fervour with a distinct Finnish flavour.
FOR FANS OF: Adramalech, Autopsy, Incantation
CURRENT RELEASE: *Manor Of Infinite Forms* (20 Buck Spin, 2018)
WEBSITE: tombmold.bandcamp.com

Årabrot: our kind of church music

Årabrot

Who Do You Love

PELAGIC

Nordic deviants flesh out their lurid vision

ÅRABROT'S EIGHTH LONG player was written and recorded in a church in the woods of Dalarna, rural Sweden – now home to frontman Kjetil Nernes. One can think of no more fitting an environment for an outfit that excel so well at evoking the depravity lurking within our higher sensibilities, even if they continue to do so frustratingly under the radar, as, like its predecessors, *Who Do You Love* proves to be one of the scene's most individualistic, interesting releases of the year so far. You get the feeling that if the band had been about in the late 80s/early 90s they'd have been huge, so effectively do they channel the charisma of alt-rock's most charismatic icons – Kjetil the bastard offspring of Iggy Pop and Killing Joke's Jaz Coleman – the transgressive figurehead we sorely need. *Maldoror's Love* gets under your skin with a plaintive guitar riff backing Kjetil's warped serenade, flourishing into a seductive groove. On *Warning* he barks impertinently from a podium at a deviant's rally. *Pygmalion* follows, a mellifluous denouement after an opening salvo of short sharp rock shocks that is as beautiful as it is disarming, setting the stage for *Sinnerman*, a ubiquitous African-American spiritual song previously covered by the likes of Nina Simone and Peter Tosh. Kjetil's interpretation is an unabashed love letter to long acknowledged influence

Nick Cave, a crowing comeuppance for sinners attempting to escape divine justice that degenerates into rapturous mania. The predatory swagger of *Look Daggers* follows; a sleaze through hell and back. *Uniform Of A Killer* makes for an odd tale to close the record, an intriguing musical labyrinth leaving a lasting impression. Ultimately, Årabrot records are a universe unto themselves, any comparisons with rock icons past at once fitting and odious, because like the best frontmen, Kjetil Nernes is a unique proposition, an iconoclast for dark and dysfunctional times, whose perverted dogma you would do well to fall under the sway of.

9

FOR FANS OF: Turbonegro, QOTSA, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds

TOM O'BOYLE

Axis Of Despair

Contempt For Man

SOUTHERN LORD

Precision-tooled grind in need of a few loose screws

While many of Southern Lord's acts have dabbled in the art, *Contempt For Man* represents a rare foray into pure grind for the label. It has to be said, though, that if you're charging headlong into the genre then it doesn't hurt that the band have Anders Jakobson behind the drumkit; he's been shattering vertebrae with the likes of Coldworker, Necrony and Nasum since the early 90s, after all. It's not all about frenzied percussion, however: Axis Of Despair deal in lean muscularity that's designed to cause maximum damage with maximum efficiency. The riffs come thick and fast, flowing like molten metal while Joel Fornbrant's tirelessly belligerent vocals provide shock after shock to the system. It's a clean, clinical and utterly regimented brand of grind that doles out vicious beatings like clockwork. This perfectionism, however, also holds things slightly back – with so many grinders out there violently vying for our attention, something a bit more crazed mightn't go amiss.

6

FOR FANS OF: Nasum, Human Cull, Wormrot

ALEX DELLER

Bæst

Danse Macabre

CENTURY MEDIA

Danish death metal quintet don't muck around

Though they may have missed the HM-2-worship explosion by a few years, Bæst's debut was worth the wait nonetheless – and besides, there's more to this Danish quintet than straight-up Entombed emulation anyway. From the melodic Dismember-esque harmonies of opener *Crosswhore*, it's clear Bæst are no slouches when it comes to robust, old-school Swedish-style riffery (and they've got a sufficiently girthy guitar tone to back it up), but they also dip their toes into jagged, head-spinning Morbid Angel-isms – check out *Messe Macabre* – and more progressive territory when called for, too. The title track, for instance, begins with plaintive acoustic guitars à la Opeth, before exploding in a flurry of vintage death metal tremolo. While it doesn't exactly reinvent the wheel, *Danse Macabre* is a solid debut with enough personality and songwriting clout to establish Bæst as a band to keep an eye on.

6

FOR FANS OF: Dismember, Morbid Angel, Bloodbath

KEZ WHELAN

Black Elephant

Cosmic Blues

SMALL STONE

Fuzz-laden retro-rockers try to stand out from the herd

Italian psychedelic fuzz merchants Black Elephant continue their love affair with all things old school on their suitably mammoth-sounding third album. Utterly in the thrall of the riff and evoking the ghosts of Thin Lizzy, Sabbath and Hendrix throughout, the spartan, almost live production gives the impeccable players room to express themselves and the record is full of deft fretwork, bluesy licks and, in *Walking Dead*, some wonderfully OTT hooks. Keeping vocals to a minimum, the wah wah pedal-battering title track is a standout, as is the exceedingly groovy *Helter Skelter*, which is driven by guitars that are fuzzier than a billy goat's undercarriage. Funk-peppered instrumental *Chase Me* offers a welcome curveball and it calls to mind Clutch rocking out in their jam room. While the record runs out of steam once the monstrous early Soundgarden-minded fifth track *Baby Eroina* finishes, it's still a fun, if slightly forgettable slab of primal goodness.

6

FOR FANS OF: Nebula, Unida, Black Label Society

EDWIN McFEE

Born To Murder The World

The Infinite Mirror Of Millennial Narcissism

EXTRINSIC RECORDINGS

Napalm Death and Anaal Nathrakh maestros combine forces

Given their shared passion for all-out sonic annihilation, it's surprising that it's taken until 2018 for bassist extraordinaire Shane Embury and Anaal Nathrakh mastermind Mick Kenney to form a band together. This debut sounds pretty much as you'd expect, fusing raucous punk powerchords with sinister blackened riffery, ridiculous programmed drums and throat-shredding shrieks courtesy of Fukpig vocalist Duncan Wilkins. Sitting somewhere in between Napalm Death's raw, spontaneous energy and Anaal Nathrakh's more calculated, clinical efficiency, the whole thing blasts past in 15 minutes, leaving no room for filler. Songs like *Poisoning Purity* recall Nasum's intensity, while *Corruption Feeds Deception* showcases Mick's love of eerie, Mayhem-style dissonance, and *Penetrate The Descent* somehow manages to do both in just over a minute. This is the sound of three extreme music veterans cutting loose and making the most abrasive record they can muster, and it's a fucking blast – quite literally. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Napalm Death, Anaal Nathrakh, Agoraphobic Nosebleed

KEZ WHELAN

Carnation

Chapel Of Abhorrence

SEASON OF MIST

Belgian death metallers have an old-school blast

Founded in 2013 to pay tribute to their favourite 80s and early 90s death metal bands, it didn't take long for these Belgian berserkers to become their own monster, and their 2015 neck-bothering EP *Cemetery Of The Insane* turned plenty of heads. Debut LP *Chapel Of Abhorrence* marks another stride forward for the globe-trotting road warriors and the opus captures all the raw power of their face-melting live show. Informed by the Swedish and Floridian scenes of old, bulldozer riffs, copious time changes and guttural vocals are the order of the day over the course of 11 cuts. Highlights include the incendiary *Hellfire*, the thrash and punk-infused *Hatred Unleashed* and the rampaging title track, which is a massive statement of intent and features a ferocious performance from their frontman Simon Duson. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Brutal Truth, Entombed, Dismember

EDWIN McFEE

Foscor

Les Irreals Versions

SEASON OF MIST

Catalonian explorers rework past endeavours

There's no denying that Barcelona's Foscor make beautiful music and their heavy, dark metal is the perfect vehicle for their brand of gothic-leaning doom. *Les Irreals Versions* is the reworking of songs from previous two releases, *Those Horrors Wither* and *Les Irreals Visions*, and where the original songs held beauty depths within their weighty structures, these new versions hold it in simpler acoustic movements and JJ Fiar's delicate voice. However, *Les Irreals Versions* suffers from losing those heavier elements and where *Altars* once soared it now drags. Stripping back the electronic instruments doesn't change the song enough to make this version worthwhile. *L.Amor.t* does more to address the balance and takes away the growling death doom vocals, replacing them with gorgeous clean vocals filled with emotion, while keyboards add texture and the drama is returned at last. **6**

FOR FANS OF: Katatonia, Anathema, Agalloch

CHERYL CARTER

Haunt

Burst Into Flame

SHADOW KINGDOM

Fresno's doom denizen changes tack with stirring results

Not content with flying the flag for doom with Beastmaker, Trevor Church seems determined to corner the market in old-school tropes done properly. Haunt are an unapologetic tribute to the wildly melodic days of early Maiden, later Lizzy and the flawed but intermittently fruitful splurge of the NWOBHM. Unlike many of their peers, however, they never sound like a studied or cynical attempt to mimic something they only ever experienced second hand. These are brilliant songs; the sublime sound of those twin-lead refrains and the understated swing of the rhythm section make the opening title track and the indecently catchy *Reflectors* feel at least comparable to the classics they're saluting. The production, too, strikes a balance between old-school rawness and modern heft. File under 'heavy metal' and play loud. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Angel Witch, Iron Maiden, Wolf

DOM LAWSON

The Skull: rest assured, doom is in safe hands

The Skull

The Endless Road Turns Dark

TEE PEE

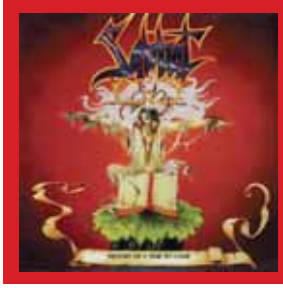
Trouble frontman returns with his all-star doom crew

IN A WAY, the ultimate compliment for a doom record is 'Man, I can't believe no one did that riff before!' Still working out of Iommi's 50-year-old rulebook, you might think that every downcast chord progression and sinister melody had been interred by now, yet on their second LP The Skull continue unearthing intrinsically satisfying new variations on doom's hoary blueprint. Not surprising, since this band is a spin-off from Chicagoan 'white doom' pioneers Trouble, with Eric Wagner's otherworldly voice sounding wiser and more relaxed, but more authoritative and powerful than on The Skull's 2014 debut, *For Those Which Are Asleep*. There are subtle yet effective twin guitar harmonies – conspicuous by their absence from the debut – plus a tasteful dash of 60s psych/prog eccentricity on *From Myself Depart* and *All That Remains (Is True)*, and if you think the thunderous drums pack a familiar wallop, you're right: ex-Cathedral skin-punisher Brian Dixon has at last found a new vehicle for his sublime hammer-of-doom skills. Additionally, the guitarist's from Witch Mountain, so you know you're in safe hands with this veritable doom supergroup, expertly blending the soulful American blue-collar doom rock approach with the more mystical, macabre European tradition. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Trouble, Black Sabbath, Candlemass

CHRIS CHANTLER

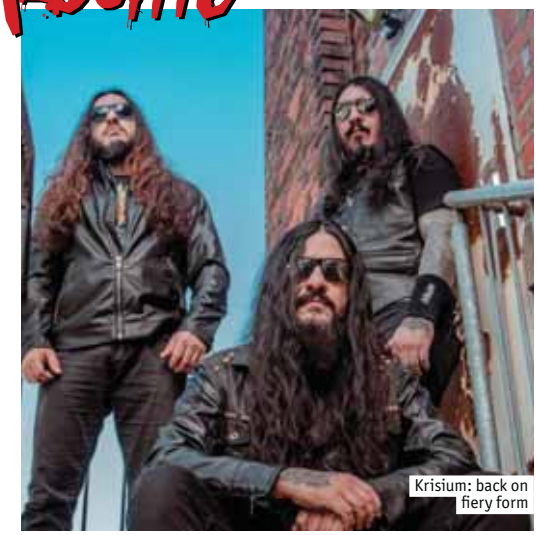
Original Sins A CLASSIC ALBUM FROM THE DARKEST VAULT



Sabbat History Of A Time To Come

NOISE *1988*

British thrash metal in the 80s was a story of underachievement, but with one notable exception. Sabbat sounded different from their peers, most of whom were in thrall to a distinctly American style of thrash. Fuelled by Priest, Accept and Mercyful Fate, the Nottingham quartet's debut album was an epic, intricate slab of wildly inventive and eccentric extremity. Vocalist Martin Walkyier's detailed lyrics told tales of religious zealotry, Biblical horrors and pointless, bloody wars (and you can bet that a young Dani Filth was taking notes). Meanwhile, 18-year-old guitarist Andy Sneap served up a bewildering barrage of razor-edged and subtly blackened riffs that oozed melodramatic finesse. A stone-cold classic and a British thrash benchmark.



Krisium: back on fiery form

Krisiun

Scourge Of The Enthroned

CENTURY MEDIA

Brazil's longest-serving death metal band still mean business

THE LAST TIME we heard from this Brazilian powerhouse, they seemed to be experiencing something of a mid-career crisis. Krisiun have always been a band you can rely on for ultra-tight, lightning-fast death metal, but 2015's hour-long *Forged In Fury* found the trio dropping the pace and experimenting with slower, chuggier passages. It wasn't a bad record by any means, just a strangely uninspiring one given what the band were capable of.

For their latest, however, Krisiun have returned to their roots and treated us to half an hour of feral, no-nonsense death metal. The opening title track may kick things off with a cumbersome, deliciously doom-laden slow section, but it isn't long before the trio blast into overdrive, hitting a furious tempo that they maintain for the rest of the record. *Demonic Three* may as well be a description of the band itself, and with its relentless blasts, crunchy, razor-sharp guitar sound and wailing Slayer-esque solos, it's a perfect encapsulation of their sound and a firm reminder of what made this band so great in the first place – there's even a cheeky nod to debut *Black Force Domain* here for the diehards.

Make no mistake, though: this isn't the sound of a band merely trying to recapture former glories. Having kept the same line-up for close to three decades, Krisiun have arguably never sounded tighter, striking with ruthless precision on songs like *Electricide* whilst riding convulsing, off-kilter rhythms that would surely sound awkward in the hands of a lesser act.

Scourge Of The Enthroned probably won't topple fan-favourite *Conquerors Of Armageddon* as the ultimate Krisiun album, but it's easily their most exhilarating and brutal opus since 2008's *Southern Storm* and serves as a gleefully extended middle finger to any fairweather fans who were willing to put them out to pasture after the last record. Welcome back, lads!

8

FOR FANS OF: Deicide, Vital Remains, Vader

KEZ WHELAN

Innumerable Forms

Punishment In Flesh

PROFOUND LORE

New England's former punk steals the death/doom crown

Although virtually unknown outside the Boston hardcore/punk scene until recently, multi-instrumentalist Justin DeTore has turned everything he has touched of late into gold, be it classic NWOBHM (Stone Dagger), epic heavy metal (Sumerlands) or old-school doom (Magic Circle). Innumerable Forms is his take on the original death/doom sound, but unlike the obvious reference points (early Anathema, My Dying Bride demo), this first album proper, recorded with a full line-up including Mammoth Grinder, Genocide Pact and Power Trip members, is neither naïve nor ill-produced. Instead, this might be one of the genre's most primitive yet most concise (see the two-and-a-half-minute dirge *Petrified* for proof) and crushing incarnations in years. The guitar tone alone is the size of Godzilla and the brutal cover referencing Kreator's *Out Of The Dark... Into The Light* EP is a good indication of how bleak *Punishment...* is.

8

FOR FANS OF: Evoken, Incantation, Paradise Lost

OLIVIER BADIN

Iskald

Innhøstinga

INDIE RECORDINGS

Nordic black metallers get lost in their own sprawl

Norway's Iskald – Aage André Krekling (drums) and Simon Larsen (vocals, guitar, bass, and keyboards) – are a melodic black metal band now on their fifth album. Unfortunately, the issues that hampered their previous four releases still persist. Musically, Iskald place too much merit on complexity, with aspects of thrash and technical death metal in the mix, and fail to really grip the listener because of the over-abundance of riff and tempo changes. They switch direction so much within each song that the emotional resonance from the guitars – a necessity in melodic black metal – rarely registers, and so the songs blur together through an array of ever-shifting drum patterns. The croaky vocals are still fairly non-descript, which also does nothing to differentiate Iskald from the rest of the lower-tier Scandinavian black metal acts currently rehashing a style that was executed with more ingenuity and individuality in the 90s.

6

DEAN BROWN

Jungle Rot

Jungle Rot

VICTORY

Maximized artillery equals maximum casualty

Those US midwest veterans are a perfect representation of the seminal US death metal spirit. Like fellow contemporaries such as Obituary and Cianide, they built their own template a long time ago – in Jungle Rot's case, war-obsessed themes, thrashy grooves and straightforward riffing – and haven't deviated from it. But after a couple of so-so albums and a now seven-year (but still baffling) alliance with Victory Records (it's like a ska-punk band signing to a black metal label), their stubbornness is finally paying off. The addition of a very bombastic Dan Swanö production and solid musicianship – especially by returning session drummer Jesse Beahler – give them a new lease of life. The hooks are plentiful and even founding member David Mastise's barking vocals seem more focused, turning their ninth full-length into what is probably their most lethal assault yet.

7

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Pro-Pain, Obituary

OLIVIER BADIN

SMALL MERCIES

SHORT BLASTS

Goat Disciple

Wolfcult Domination

BLOOD HARVEST

This debut EP from Utah-based war metal act Goat Disciple packs plenty of sonic clout, as bestial vocals corrode skin when combined with frenzied riffs and drums in the same black vein as figureheads Diocletian or Blasphemy. **[7]**

DEAN BROWN

Integrity/Krieg

Split

RELAPSE

Playing this to someone with no knowledge of either black metal (Krieg) or 'holy terror' hardcore (Integrity) should clear confusion. One exudes misanthropy via sullen atonality, the other courtesy a triumphant riff cavalcade. Both demonstrate that evil has no boundaries. **[7]**

CONNIE GORDON

Unanimated

Annihilation

CENTURY MEDIA

Ex and current members of Dismember, Desultory and Unleashed reunite for the first time in nine years to deliver vintage melodic black/death. Not quite the level of their two mid-90s albums but still with that extra Swedish touch... **[6]**

OLIVIER BADIN

Mutilation Rites

Chasm

GILEAD MEDIA/ARGENTO

Making Brooklyn, NYC dirty and satanic once more

It feels right for Mutilation Rites to be back on a more basic underground/DIY railroad after a two-albums stint with Prosthetic just as they've gone further down the caveman route. The more their hyped Brooklyn BM peers dwell in arty and dissonant territories, the more this lot have let dirty crust and bestial death metal influences creep in. Partly recorded live at the now-famous Saint Vitus Bar in their hometown, *Chasm* lives up to its blood-tainted songtitles (*Putrid Decomposition, Ominous Rituals*) and Mark Riddick's gruesome, black and white artwork. This is black metal with the emphasis on the word 'black' where the rather epic (the title track is over 10 minutes long) and piercing riffs are, like their mates in Black Anvil, permeated with a tangible grit determined to annihilate any hipster within a 15-mile range. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Tombs, Satyricon

OLIVIER BADIN

Pyreficativm

Path Of The World

LIVING TEMPLE

Mind-bending black metal spiritualism from Chile

From its Hindi script title (roughly translated as 'Path Of The World') to its opening three minutes of twinkling, psychedelic ambience, Chilean cultists Pyreficativm's debut makes no attempt to conform to even standard notions of avant-garde BM, let alone more orthodox strains. When heaviness does arrive, it's in the form of a slow-burning wave of dissonant melancholy, chest-deep in eerie reverb and underpinned by unnerving, cavernous drones. Meanwhile, bursts of speed are tempered by ethereal female voices and a haze of grim anxiety. Clearly, this is not familiar territory and we haven't reached the end of the first track. Fans of Negura Bunget will be familiar with this gleeful dismantling of expected norms and an other-worldly, quasi-spiritual aesthetic that strives to deliver more than mere riffs and screams. Across 75 bewildering minutes, the flame of the old school is a reassuring, flickering presence, but at its heart this is an audacious journey through dark worlds yet unexplored. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Negura Bunget, Shammasch, Morbus Chron

DOM LAWSON

Senzar

Non Titled

HOSTILE MEDIA

Former Coldwar warriors seek ontological enlightenment

Formed from the ashes of Dublin riff lords Coldwar, the just-launched Senzar have announced their arrival on the extreme metal scene in riotous fashion with this titanic, title-shunning debut opus. Aiming to "explore the unity and multiplicity of being" via the medium of head-cracking guitars and paint-stripping vocals, the six-song-strong release offers a ferocious first taste of what this new band of seasoned veterans can do. Setting their stall out strongly with the monstrous, molar-rattling *CI*, the band flirt with BM indebted atmospherics (*CIII*) and bludgeoning, super fast crust-flecked hardcore riffs (*CV*) over the course of around 30 minutes. Vocalist Trevor McLave proves that you can also teach an old dog new tricks and he sometimes adds a sinister edge to his voice which gives the likes of the crushing *CII* even more menace. **7**

FOR FANS OF: Coldwar, Overoth, Slave Zero

EDWIN McFEE

The Spirit

Sounds From The Vortex

NUCLEAR BLAST

Melodic black/death with impeccable sources

Originally released in 2017 through Eternal Echoes but limited to 500 copies, the debut album from German black/death metallers The Spirit is now being reissued by Nuclear Blast. This is huge for the four-piece who are clearly students of Dissection and, by association, Watain, as the scythe-swingin', melodic majesty of the former and the rabid intensity of the latter is evident throughout this debut. There's also the anthemic rabble-rousing of Tribulation, particularly vocally, to be found during *The Clouds Of Damnation* and *Cross The Bridge To Eternity* – a contemporary comparison that may intrigue some readers. The sharp songcraft together with the seamless interplay between the guitarists belies the fact that this is The Spirit's first release. We could have something really special on our hands here, and the backing of an industry behemoth should give this band the exposure their wind-swept music deserves. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Dissection, Tribulation, Watain

DEAN BROWN

My Favourite Artwork

PAUL KENNEY

Fukpig

EXTREME NOISE TERROR

Phonophobia

"There's something striking about it. The harsh contrast of clashing black and white, the image of someone smashing a guitar into a cab; it looks angry before you even get the record out. As soon as I saw it I needed to own it and hear it."

Mantar: twisted fire-starters

Mantar

The Modern Art Of Setting Ablaze

NUCLEAR BLAST

German duo add more oxygen to the flames

AS A QUICK refresher, let's recall that this German duo's discography reads like so: *Death By Burning, Ode To The Flame* and, now, *The Modern Art Of Setting Ablaze*. So fire is a topic guitarist/vocalist Hanno Klänhardt and drummer Erinc Sakarya have woven into their band over the course of six years. For our science know-nothings and chemistry dropout readers, know that heat, oxygen, fuel and a chemical reaction are the necessary ingredients for fire's existence; all four are required and the more you add of any, the bigger the conflagration. Mantar have always worked to sound more expansive with their two-piece line-up, but putting metaphorical interest into practice, this album employs more instrumental layers, textures, effects and a rhythmic thump that connects both intellectually and primordially.

Album opener *The Knowing* crescendos into the twisted tri-tone tribalism of *Age Of The Absurd*, a filthy spire of mid-paced ooze populating a black hole between Slayer and Neurosis. *Seek + Forget* complements a more straight-ahead, four-on-the-floor rock feel with duelling guitars, walking bass and swelling strains of keyboards. *Dynasty Of Nails* and *Midgard Serpent (Seasons Of Failure)* are gnashing and untethered flailings at personal issues and societal demons, while *Eternal Return* could be the Melvins ferally mixing, mashing (and moshing, for that matter) different segments of *Speak English Or Die*. All of the above, it should be noted, is much more exciting than the band's occasional manoeuvre into momentum-stemming, sparse and slo-mo doom territory and the persistent staccato of Hanno's vocal delivery, which can wear thin after 40-plus minutes.

There's the matter of how the additional thickness propelling this album is going to come across in a live setting, but as a standalone work, this album transcends sludge metal tropes with increased density and dynamics that shatter limitations and preconceptions of Mantar's pared-down line-up. **8**

FOR FANS OF: Melvins, Black Tusk, Inter Arma

CONNIE GORDON

Diamond Head: NWOBHM legends (just ask Lars Ulrich)

Various Artists

Winds Of Time: The New Wave Of British Heavy Metal 1979-1985

CHERRY RED/HNE

You're never too cool for the old school, fool!

THE NEW WAVE Of British Heavy Metal was a diverse and somewhat eccentric rabble of UK-based hard rock and heavy metal bands, many of whom existed for years before the NWOBHM acronym was first unveiled by the press in 1979. Its enduring influence is unquestionable, but the way some posturing purists talk about it now, you would think that every band that emerged from it produced nothing but solid gold. In reality, and as *Winds Of Time* demonstrates brilliantly, the NWOBHM was every bit as hit and miss as any other subgenre you might mention. When it was great, it was truly great. When it wasn't… well, there is a good reason why some of the bands on this three-disc set are not household names.

Despite the expected absence of Iron Maiden and Def Leppard, both of whom outgrew and transcended the scene before it had really started, *Winds Of Time* is easily one of the most comprehensive and smartly compiled NWOBHM compendiums to date. From esteemed heavyweights Saxon, Venom, Diamond Head and Angel Witch through to cult favourites Satan, Jaguar and Witchfynde, the very best of the era is proudly represented. Whether it's the turbocharged glam rock of Girlschool's *Take It All Away*, Raven's snotty prog metal epic, *Tyrant Of The Airwaves*, White Spirit's Deep Purple-saluting *Midnight Chaser* or the shrapnel-battered punk'n'roll of Warfare's *Metal Anarchy*, it's *nearly* all great. No one with an ounce of self-respect regards the likes of Dark Star, Ace Lane or Badge as seminal bands in metal's evolution, but even the most naïve and half-baked tracks here have great energy and bullish charm. The result is a satisfyingly honest retrospective that shines an adoring light on the NWOBHM's imperfect but undeniably significant contribution to the music we love.

7

FOR FANS OF: Saxon, Metallica, Motörhead

DOM LAWSON

Thou

Magus

GILEAD MEDIA

Sludgy Louisianians dredge up the voice of unrest

Baton Rouge's Thou have preceded the release of their first full-length since 2014's *Heathen* with three EPs, each bringing to the fore different core elements of the sludge band's sound: grunge, acoustic guitars, droning rhythms. All those elements are present here. Vocalist Bryan Funck is a deadly force and his voice is laced with anguish throughout a record that finds itself in a state of constant turmoil. Highlighting this flux is *The Changeling Prince*'s fuzzed-out guitars, which gradually spin out into lighter motions and add glimmers of hope to a track that carries the weight of the world on its shoulders. Thou constantly shift between primal rage, a sense of not belonging and anger at the modern world and on *Magus* they handle those emotions with a pure, unfiltered look at what makes us human and all the detritus that comes in its wake.

8

FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, The Body, Indian

CHERYL CARTER

Trappist

Ancient Brewing Tactics

RELAPSE

Crust-smeared LA punks go beyond the ale

There are countless metal songs about beer. Some bands (Tankard) have even dedicated their whole career to it, and it also drives hardcore straight-edgers nuts, which is a definitive plus. As intentionally Spinal Tap-ish and easily forgettable as Trappist might be, *Ancient Brewing Tactics* is damn good fun to listen to. It's old-school hardcore done by and for guys with a solid sense of humour. But the 21 pranks within are penned by scene veteran and renowned beer expert Chris Dodge (Spazz, Infest), so underneath these two-minute outbursts with hooligan chants and goofy song titles – *99 Problems (But A Beer Ain't One)*, *Wolves In The Tap Room*) – you could easily draw a parallel between his tongue-in-cheek defence of crafted beer and the state of underground music. Champagne with a fancy dinner this ain't; it's just a few rounds with some mates, taking the piss.

6

FOR FANS OF: Spazz, Despise You, Minor Threat

OLIVIER BADIN

Uniform

The Long Walk

SACRED BONES

Soul-straining odes from the New York/Purgatory borderlands

New York duo Uniform have herein crafted something so bleakly dissonant it's as if they are trying to punish you, the recruitment of Liturgy drummer Greg Fox furthering their cause. *The Walk* is a barefoot frogmarch over broken glass, the uncomfortably noise-drenched guitars and enraged perma-stomp pulsating alongside vocalist Michael Berdan's militant, monotone bark. The band smash heavy music's history into smithereens and regurgitate it, mangled. *Found* is an old-school hardcore track drowned in sludge, *Headless Eyes* takes a stoner groove and asphyxiates it with static, before *Peaceable Kingdom*'s droning intro descends into mania. The stark image of a child behind a fence on *The Long Walk*'s cover gives a strong impression of where the source of Uniform's antipathy lies, and while their impassioned rage is laudable, it takes resilient ears to get through it all.

6

FOR FANS OF: Godflesh, Thou, The Body

TOM O'BOYLE

Wombripper

From The Depths Of Flesh

REDEFINING DARKNESS

Russian death squad soup up their HM-2s

Never mind the World Cup: the most exciting thing happening in Russia this year is the sound of old-school Swedish death metal being given a massive, jolting boot up the backside. Wombripper sound like their name: violent, twisted, indefensible. This is flagrant HM-2 worship but delivered with such venom, verve and eyeball-popping intensity that even those revered Nihilist demo recordings would shrivel in its suffocating, blood-muddied shadow. Songs like flat-out opener *Still Unborn* and the aptly named *Frantic Exhumation* score highly when it comes to hooks and memorable riffs, but really it's the startling levels of extremity and disruptive zeal that make this such a bruising revelation. Even when Wombripper flex their compositional biceps on the doom-driven sprawl of *Godless Slaughter (In The Name Of Doom)*, they still sound like they could, and probably will, start a bloody revolution.

8

FOR FANS OF: Nihilist, Lik, Paganizer

DOM LAWSON

Inspirations From Beyond

NECROSKULL
Witchsorrow
CATHEDRAL

The Ethereal Mirror

"From the first time I heard *The Ethereal Mirror*, I was obsessed! Gaz Jennings' riffs were absolutely perfect, and I loved how they seemed to have this whole doom world. They're like The Law – or The Lore? – of doom that I can't help but obey!"

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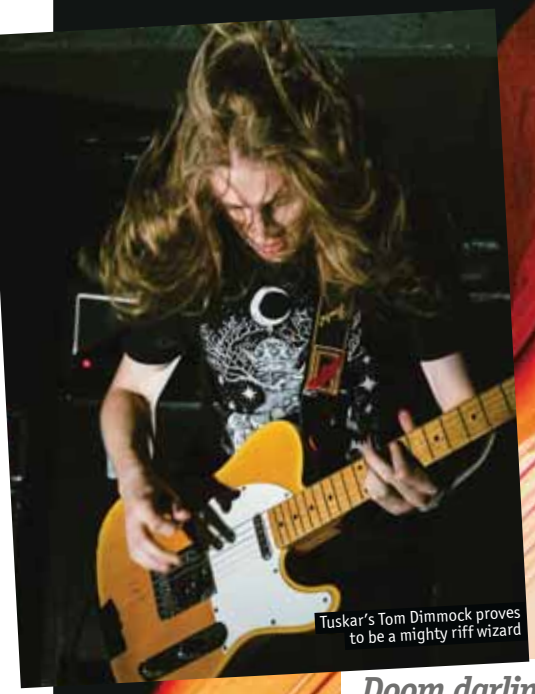
Pallbearer's Joseph D Rowland adds some bludgeon to the foreboding

Pallbearer

TUSKAR

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON



Tuskar's Tom Dimmock proves to be a mighty riff wizard

Doom darlings scale new heights and heartfelt lows

PALLBEARER HAD A remarkable 2017 with a wide range of metal and, crucially, non-metal outlets proclaiming their LP *Heartless* to be one of the best of the year. With so much goodwill being thrust their way, you can forgive the fact they were originally booked to play Islington Assembly Hall. It's with a slightly heavy heart that we find ourselves in the Underworld instead this evening, a venue almost half the size, but it is to their eternal credit, then, that Pallbearer appear completely unfazed, infusing the room with a celebratory air that is immediately infectious.

Before that triumphant showing, however, we're treated to the unexpected aural thrill of stoner black metallers **TUSKAR [8]**. The two-piece employ a fantastic use of dynamics that recall the more sludge-encrusted cuts from Mastodon's *Remission*. Drummer Tyler Hodges does a remarkable job of laying down furious grooves and powerful earthy vocals simultaneously, and with little to distract you from the almighty riffs guitarist Tom Dimmock peels out from his six strings, the power of their sound hits with extraordinary potency. It can be tough for duos to sustain interest over a period of time but for 30 minutes tonight, we are in the palm of Tuskar's hands.

PALLBEARER [8] begin with the punishingly heavy grooves of *Watcher In The Dark*, which pretty much sets out the stall for the rest of the evening: hazy, heady, heavy grooves that paradoxically soothe and bludgeon with equal force. The setlist is weighted pretty equally across the band's three albums but it's *Thorns* and *Dancing With Madness*, the two cuts taken from *Heartless*, that showcase their greatest strengths. The latter in particular marries punishing, detuned riffs with psych-infused, blissed-out passages that show hints of the early Metallica material that was blessed by Cliff Burton's hand. Pallbearer enchant their audience into a hypnotic stupor, a vortex where time is manipulated, making 10-minute epics fly by in what appears to be half the time. They're clearly as stoked to be here as we are to see them, a fact reinforced by the crowd's cry of "One more song" come the set's end. They duly oblige with that rarest of things, a *genuine* encore and we are treated to a blistering rendition of *Devoid Of Redemption*. Next time Pallbearer come to these shores, let's hope that they get another shot at playing Islington's famed town hall. On this form, they sure as hell deserve it.

REMFRY DEDMAN

SETLIST

Watcher In The Dark
Dropout
Thorns
Dancing In Madness
Worlds Apart
Foreigner
Given To The Grave

ENCORE
Devoid Of Redemption

Bong

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

If your aim is to reach the infinite then the number of people it takes to reach that goal is going to be a moot point. Tonight, Bong have been distilled to the nucleus of a three-piece, but ultimately the confines of the Black Heart are going to be revealed as some arbitrary mental construct, giving way to vast reaches beyond. Tonight is a showcase for the new album, *Thought And Existence*, but like any band whose primary weapon is resonance, theirs is a set that reveals an enveloping dynamic all of its own. It begins with droning guitar frequencies, drums like a natural aeons-old phenomenon revealed in languid time-lapse, and Dave Terry's monotone incantations. At first you feel as though you're not sure if the drugs have kicked in yet. But such is the cumulative effect that without warning, you're in the centre of a boundless state of bliss as layers are added, riffs unfurl and it all coagulates into a series of seismic judders like a post-coital moment with the cosmos.

8

JONATHAN SELZER

Thornafire

BLASFEME/VOID/DGORATH

THE DEVONSHIRE ARMS, LONDON

DGORATH's **[6]** grindcore aggression kicks off proceedings, but a sub-par PA makes it difficult to pinpoint the moments of melody amidst their ferocious performance. Hidden behind eerie masks, **VOID [8]** embark on a twisted, avant-metal journey between black, groove and traditional metal riffing that gets more refined as the Dev fills up. Bristol's **BLASFEME [7]** dish out a macabre BM performance, with Matt Fothergill shredding a hellish merry-go-round beneath vocalist Jake Ettle-Iles' low-slung gutturals. Their performance doesn't stray from familiarity, but it's still enjoyable. Santiago trio **THORNAFIRE**'s **[8]** closing assault blisters the venue with a sense of dread – much to the delight of onlookers. Drummer Tomas Inostroza's rhythmic exploration underpins a discordant chug-fest topped with Andrés Arancibia's roaring vocals. While four performances in one evening has meant woefully shortened sets, the Chileans' display of classic extreme death metal serves as a satisfyingly weighty climax.

LUKE MILNE

Eyehategod's Jimmy Bower can see for miles ahead of the pack

What doesn't kill Mike Williams makes him look younger

Eyehategod

DVNE/GURT

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

NOLA sludge legends hold on to their core strengths

LONDONERS GURT [5] are clearly chuffed to be sharing a stage with their heroes, but while they provide lolloping riffs and *'Yo-oww-owwww'*-lling vocals in spades, their fun-times stoner doom lacks substance. **DVNE [5]** are far more po-faced, peddling something heavy and proggy that combines Isis, Kyuss and Tesseract. With roving basslines, note-perfect warbles and carefully studied Rock God poses, the band know where they're going, though they might want to dig around and find something of their own before they get there. That **EYEHATEGOD [8]** are still with us after 30 years of disaster and degradation is laudable, but their ability to remain so *vital* borders on the miraculous. What so many sludge copyists seem to forget is that Eyehategod are, at ruptured heart, a drug-mangled hardcore band, and cuts like *Parish Motel Sickness* or *Sister Fucker* owe as much to Black Flag or The Germs as they do Iommi and Osbourne. Grizzled guitarist Jimmy Bower casually chucks out milestone riffs without a backward glance while frontman Mike Williams expectorates vicious, pus-from-a-wound vocals. For a man who should be dead he looks remarkably spry, and while he might wrestle his mic stand like he's rolling with punches he still takes time to josh the crowd between moments of weaponised feedback. The band make the pain they deliver look deceptively easy, but while the parts are primordial and the endorphin release of the slurred grooves transitory, the sense of strain, tension and threat behind it all remain a stomach-churning constant.

ALEX DELLER

Voices: Peter Benjamin branches out into new territories

Diamat preach the gospel of aggro

Voices

DIAMAT

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

London miscreants weave a turbulent new spell

VOICES' MISSION HAS always been an emotional and psychological one. Extreme metal might have been the first tools they had to hand, but the huge leaps between each album has been a case of reevaluating form to find its most resonant pitch, finding something more fertile beneath the black and death casing. Tonight is the launch for their third album, *Frightened*, and support act **DIAMAT [7]** are an apt, frequency-jamming choice. Power electronics can be overly po-faced or a desperate attempt to sound edgy, but the glee written across mainman Saint Max's smirk and from behind the tinted glasses is the mark of someone who knows how to twist the knife. "We love black metal, with its barely concealed Nazism and child porn scandals," he barks as Killing Joke samples are mangled amid gratuitously heavy grooves and white noise whipped up into a delirious froth as the duo yoke the audience into their melée. The packed, committed crowd tonight are a sign that **VOICES [8]** are becoming a cause célèbre, a band marking out new and necessary, cathartic territory. If the PA isn't initially a match for their mournfully turbulent dynamics, *Unknown*'s glistening surges and *Evaporated*'s post-punk lurch lacking the space to breathe, there's a bond between band and crowd that raises the atmosphere to the level of communion. *Petrograph* fuses Virus and Killing Joke to staggering effect, frontman Peter Benjamin embodies the wracked, rapt nature of the band's new sound, and if tonight marks a departure, it's also the arrival of something magical.

JONATHAN SELZER

PALL BEARER: MARIE KORNER/EYEHATEGOD: DEREK BREMNER/VOICES: MARIE KORNER

The Metal Test

Pitting your heroes against the test that really matters

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

ALEISTER BLACK

Aleister Black: double-hard bastard

WHAT'S THE MOST ILLEGAL THING YOU'VE EVER DONE?
"You guys are gonna be so disappointed – I'm a good boy! Really! I'm not even giving you a 'political answer'. I don't believe in doing anything illegal. I've never stolen, I've never had a parking ticket, I've never broken the law! I'm a horrible rock star." ✗

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL ALBUM YOU OWN?
"I dunno if it'd be the most metal thing now, but it was pretty metal for a 15-year-old. I bought Immortal's *Damned In Black*. I've got a few Gorgoroth albums – those are pretty metal." ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST INJURY YOU'VE EVER HAD?
"It was an infection, back in 2005. I had a small cut in my leg from a wrestling match, and I think the ring at the time wasn't very clean. I got such a bad infection that I was hallucinating. My mom said, 'You have to go to the doctor right now. Your skin is turning grey and there are black veins on your legs.' It took me out for two months." ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST YOU'VE EVER BEEN SICK?
"Oh, it was that infection. That *definitely* answers that question." ✓

WHAT'S THE GROSSEST THING YOU'VE EVER HAD IN YOUR MOUTH?
"I think cow tongue. I had that in Japan, of course. How did it taste? Terrible!" ✓

WHAT'S THE WORST FIGHT YOU'VE EVER BEEN IN?
"It would be the first fight I ever had in my life. It was in a martial arts setting. I got knocked out in five seconds." ✓

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU BLED?
"When I wrestled Hideo Itami at Takeover and he broke my nose with a knee." ✓

WHAT'S THE RAREST PIECE OF MERCHANDISE YOU OWN?
"Ah, it's probably a Dimmu Borgir t-shirt from '98. I can't remember what is says, but I know I still have it at home. I love Dimmu Borgir, always have. There was a hardcore band from the late 70s and early 80s called Jesus And The Gospel Fuckers. This was a band by MMA legend Bob Schrijber and his brother. I have an album of theirs that is very rare, too." ✓

WHAT'S YOUR MOST PAINFUL TATTOO OR PIERCING?
"That'll be my back tattoo. It was terrible. It was just non-stop pain. There was no moment in that back piece that it got comfortable for me… ever. I couldn't sit for more than an hour and a half. And it took a year and a half to finish, because I was such a whiny little boy! Ha ha ha!" ✓

WHAT'S THE MOST METAL PICTURE ON YOUR PHONE?
"I'd say some of the cool fan art people do. They make me look like a gnarly beast and stuff like that." ✓

FINAL SCORE: 9/10. Hmmm… we can't say we're too surprised that a guy who roundhouses people for a living is metal as fuck

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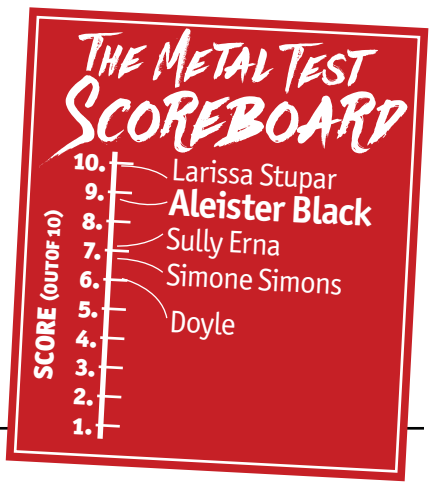

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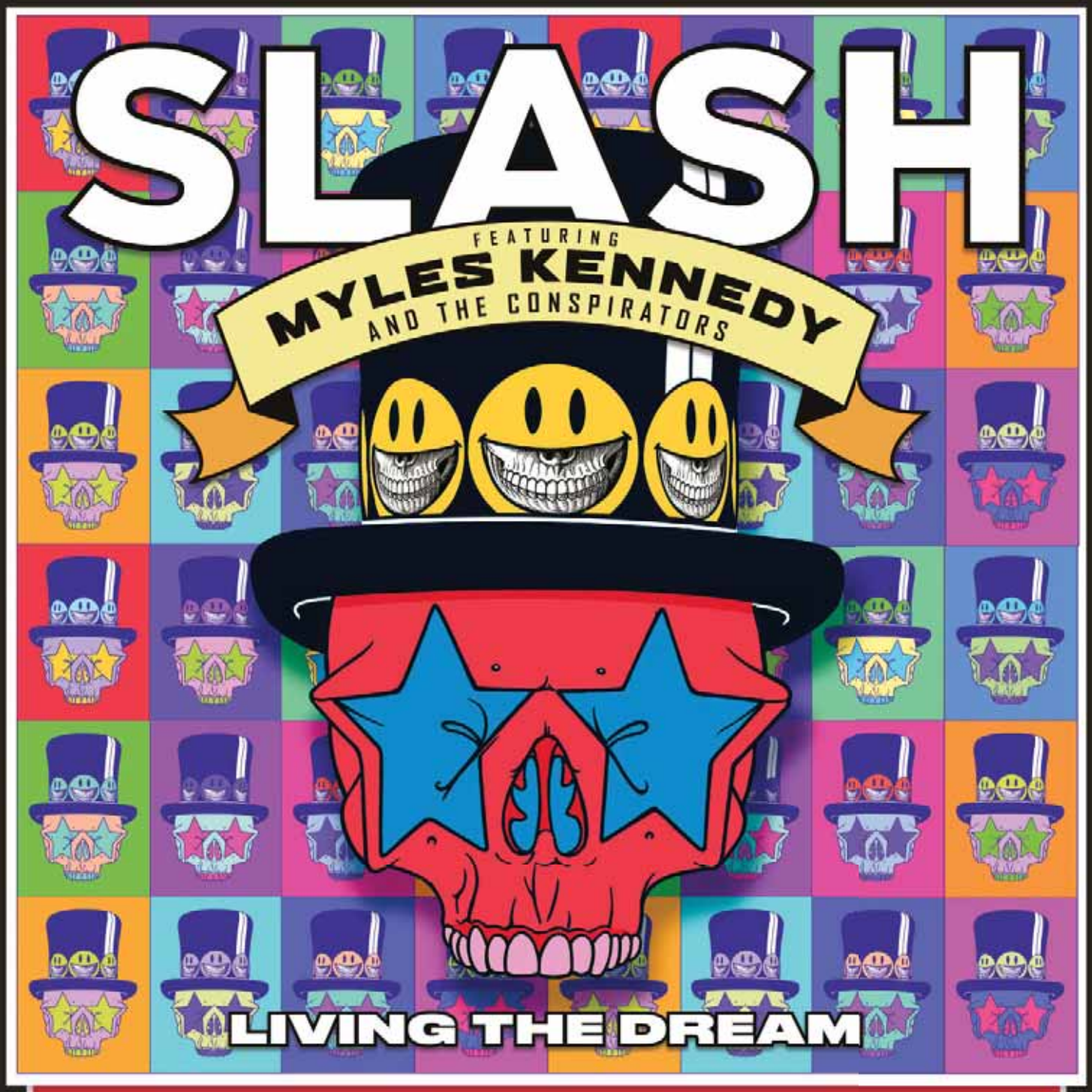

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